

Hitler's Third Reich – Issue 30

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Originally published by Bright Star Publishing plc
Dalling Road, LONDON W6 0ES

Originally produced by Midsummer Books Ltd
Dalling Road, LONDON W6 0ES

This e-edition produced by
www.hitlersthirdreich.co.uk

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£2.95 Monthly

ISSN 1464-1968



9 771464 196011

UK £2.95
IR £3.25
New Zealand \$8.95
South Africa R24.95

Singapore S\$1.95
Malaysia Rg\$ 11.95
Malta Lm 1.95

HITLER'S Third Reich

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Published monthly by
Bright Star Publishing plc
179, Dalling Road
London W6 0ES
©2001 Bright Star Publishing plc

Colour reproduction by
Catalyst Publishing, Leamington Spa

Printed in Italy by **Officine Grafiche De Agostini**

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costs £5.95 Sterling (Ir£6.75)

Credit card orders can be made by phone on
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South Africa: Midsummer Books (Dept.H), Private Bag 10, Centurion, 0046. Telephone: (011) 652 1835 Fax: (011) 314 2984 E-mail: service@jacklin.co.za (please make cheques payable to Midsummer Subscription Services)

ISSN 1464-1976 (with video)

ISSN 1464-1968 (without video)

Publisher: Stan Morse
Editor: Adam Warner
Assistant editor: Alex Fawcett
Contributing editor: Chris Bishop
Designer: Simon Oliver
Illustrators: Simon Oliver, Chris Bishop
Photography: David Tosh
Writers: Adam Warner,

Chris Bishop,
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Our thanks to Ulric of England
(PO Box 55, Church Stretton,
Shropshire SY6 6WR)

for allowing us to photograph items
from his extensive collection.

Picture acknowledgments

Cover: Aerospace Publishing. **1:** Topham; **2:** Süddeutscher Verlag (3); **4:** Süddeutscher Verlag (2), Topham; **4:** Süddeutscher Verlag; **5:** AKG, Popperfoto (2), Topham; **6:** Popperfoto; **7:** AKG, Süddeutscher Verlag, Popperfoto, Süddeutscher Verlag; **8-11:** USHMM; **12:** AKG; **13:** Süddeutscher Verlag; **14:** AKG (4); **15:** Aerospace Publishing, AKG, Aerospace Publishing;

16: AKG, Süddeutscher Verlag; **17:** AKG, Süddeutscher Verlag, AKG; **18-21:** Aerospace Publishing; **22:** Süddeutscher Verlag; **23:** Aerospace Publishing; **24:** Süddeutscher Verlag (3); **25:** Süddeutscher Verlag, Topham, Süddeutscher Verlag, Popperfoto; **26-44:** Aerospace Publishing; **45:** Süddeutscher Verlag, Aerospace Publishing; **46-49:** Aerospace



HITLER 1933-39

The Golden Years



Above: Röhm and the SA's desire to carry the Nazi seizure of power through to its socialist revolutionary conclusion threatened the reputation of the Party at a time when it still relied on the cooperation of traditional conservative elites. The Night of the Long Knives ended the threat.

Above right: Leni Riefenstahl filmed the Triumph of the Will in 1934. Conceived as a propaganda film of the Nuremberg rally, it focused on the splendour and spectacle of the event.

Below: According to official phraseology the Nuremberg rally 'consummated the marriage of party and people'. In fact it was a carefully stage-managed display of Nazi domination.



After 1933, Hitler and the Nazi party set about consolidating their hold on the reins of power in Germany. By 1938 their position was unassailable.

WHEN HITLER WAS appointed Chancellor in 1933, German politicians and political pundits expected him to be no more than a stooge for von Papen, Hugenberg and their conservative allies. In just seven weeks Hitler had proved them wrong. The Enabling Act of 23 March 1933 ended the cabinet's dependence on the Reichstag. Hitler used President Hindenburg's emergency powers to establish a dictatorship.

At first, Papen and the right wing did not oppose him. It served their aims just as much as Hitler's to 'free' the government from the control of a Reichstag so dominated by left-wing parties. The right-wing political elite's failure to protest revealed that they had fatally underestimated their so-called puppet leader. They did not see where acts such as agreeing in the first cabinet meeting to a





'final election', would end. Poland's Marshal Pilsudski was one of the few statesmen to recognize Hitler for what he was: he urged France to join him in a pre-emptive strike on Germany. His warning fell on deaf ears.

GOERING IN PRUSSIA

Von Papen had placed Prussia under the control of a Reich Commissioner in July 1932 — himself. Goering was appointed Prussian Minister of the Interior, in theory reporting to von Papen but in practice doing Hitler's work. He purged the police and civil service of 'unreliable' elements, employing the full power of the Prussian state against political opponents.

The Reichstag Fire occurred on 27 February 1933, and in its wake some 25,000 people were arrested in March and April. The Nazis talked up the threat of a Communist rising as justification. The decree passed the day after the fire, the "Decree for the Protection of People and State", was signed by President Hindenburg. It was a death warrant for Weimar democracy. The decree suspended the most fundamental constitutional rights of German citizens: freedom of association, freedom of the press and the right to free expression. The device of 'protective custody' gave the Gestapo the powers of arbitrary arrest and imprisonment without trial.

Hitler put nothing in place of the institutions he had wrecked. The Reichstag and the cabinet still existed, but neither had any power. The judiciary was not reorganised, and neither was the legal system. Hitler subverted or ignored them until there was a direct clash — as in 1942 when General Hoepner went to court to block Hitler's order cashiering him without a trial. Hoepner won his case and a furious Hitler had the Reichstag pass a bill permitting him to change laws by unilateral decree.

CRUSHING THE SA

The lines between the Nazi Party and the German state became increasingly blurred. However some Nazi activists were disappointed that a wholesale take-over, a Nazi revolution, had not occurred. To those for whom the 'socialist' tag meant as much as the 'nationalist', the survival of the old civil service suggested Hitler had sold out to the establishment. To them it seemed that traditional power bases had been tamed and yet Hitler had failed to bestow the Party with official control of the reigns of government.

Whilst this blurring of the channels of



Above: Hitler did not achieve power on a wave of popular support, but by the actions of politicians like von Papen (left) who believed that Hitler would be their puppet and dance to their tune. Within weeks, their puppet proved himself to be the master puppeteer.



Left: Poland's General Pilsudski saw the danger of Hitler's appointment, though his was a lone voice in Europe's political community. But even he could not imagine the disastrous impact that Germany's new chancellor would have on the continent. It would be many years before Hitler's true intentions revealed themselves.

Below: Hitler, President Hindenburg (centre) and Goering (right) are photographed together in 1933. It was not long before the facade of subservient cooperation was dropped. It was never Hitler's intention to remain a traditionalist for long.





Above: Hitler called on the shades of Germany's greatest leaders in his electoral propaganda, stating his intent to follow in the tradition of the men who had created modern Germany. By placing himself directly in the line of Frederick the Great, Bismarck and Hindenburg, he made himself their natural successor, who would re-create a mythical Germany 'golden age'.

power suited Hitler, who retained ultimate control above rivalling power bases, it was unacceptable to Nazi traditionalists. At the centre of this discontent were the rowdier SA men led by Ernst Röhm. It was the unpredictability of these men and their continued calls for a social revolution at a time when Hitler's power relied on the acquiescence of the right-wing elite that led to the Night of the Long Knives.

Although the execution of Röhm and his chieftains without any semblance of juridical process alerted political opinion in Europe, in Germany it was applauded. The elimination of the SA and the death of the aged President Hindenburg left Hitler enjoying untrammelled power by the end of 1934. He celebrated his victory in the incredible spectacle that was the 1934 Nuremberg rally, filmed by Leni Riefenstahl as 'The Triumph of the Will.'

REBUILDING GREATER GERMANY

The objective to which Hitler devoted himself in his first five years was what he termed *Wiederwehrhaftmachung* — 'making the people again capable of bearing arms', as he put it to the cabinet as early as February 1933. It was far more than rearmament. It meant a comprehensive programme to restore national pride.

What began as a heavy dose of jingoistic

patriotism soon became something far more sinister. By 1941 when his armies invaded Russia, generals like Reichenau issued orders of the day to their men, reminding them that they came not as ordinary soldiers, but as "the bearers of a pitiless racial concept".

PROPAGANDA

Hitler believed that he could unite the German people in a *volksgemeinschaft*. It would be a genuine alternative to the Marxist ways of 'building socialism', while also ending liberal individualism. To this end, in Hitler's Germany, loyalty to the community and its Führer was the first priority. Family came second. Youth was the future, and the brainwashing of a generation began in earnest. Visual propaganda, parades and spectacles unsurpassed by any regime in history combined to assault the senses.

As the exiled socialists of the SPD noted from temporary safety in Prague, "the Labour Front, or 'Strength through Joy', or the Hitler Youth, everywhere they serve the same purpose...not to leave them to themselves, and if possible, not to let them think at all...The essence of Nazi control of the masses is compulsory organization on one hand and domination on the other".

Ordinary Germans had plenty to grumble about in the early years. While Hitler focused

on "making them capable of bearing arms again," food consumption remained low — it did not increase between 1933 and 1938, and fats were in short supply.

Millions of Germans had been supporters of the SPD or KPD. Though under Hitler they quickly learned to deny previous political opinions, they were not converted to Nazism overnight. Foreign observers, and SPD exiles, describe how many Germans became apolitical, regarding the Nazi regime as something — like the weather — one just had to accept.

HITLER'S VICTORIES

The Party was not held in high regard, but Hitler was seen as standing above it. He kept his plans for the military conquest of Russia to himself and posed instead as a war-weary combat veteran: a stance that won him friends at home and abroad. Support for Hitler soared as he overturned the Versailles Treaty clause by clause. The Saar plebiscite, the restoration of conscription, the establishment of an air force and the re-occupation of the Rhineland saw Hitler triumph over the caution of his own generals and the pusillanimity of the western powers. The British cut their own deal with Hitler under the terms of the London Naval Treaty in 1935. They allowed Germany to re-build a powerful fleet: without any reference to the French, who regarded this as typical of "perfidious Albion".

The reoccupation of the Rhineland has been seen as the end of the post-1918 peace settlement. That was not how it seemed at the time. From 1936-37, Hitler pursued his vain hope of an understanding, if not alliance, with Britain. Neville Chamberlain's appointment as Prime Minister in May 1937 gave him grounds for optimism, despite Ribbentrop's disastrous spell as ambassador in London. As his nemesis and successor Winston Churchill once remarked: Chamberlain wanted "to go down in history as the Great Peacemaker; and for this he was prepared to strike continually in the face of facts, and face great risks for himself and his country". His gamble did not pay off.

THE ANSCHLUSS

In March 1938 Hitler achieved his cherished ambition, the incorporation of Austria into the Reich. He did so within days of the Blomberg-Fritsch affair that left the army humbled and a rash of pro-Nazi generals promoted. *Anschluss* cemented Hitler's reputation as the greatest German statesman since Bismarck: he had built 'greater Germany' but without going to war. It also offered a glimpse of the future, as Austrian Nazis embarked on a countrywide orgy of



Reichstag fire

THE FIRE that started at around 9pm on 27 February 1933, had far greater consequences than simply the destruction of the historic centre of democracy in Germany; it signalled to the destruction of democracy itself.

Hitler and the Nazis pounced upon the event. The discovery of Marinus van der Lubbe, an anarchist member of a Communist splinter group at the scene, was presented as unequivocal proof of an imminent Communist uprising. The Nazis saw to it that the Communist campaign for the 5 March elections was halted. The SPD's campaign was seriously hampered by prohibitions on the publication of pamphlets and newspapers, and on public gatherings. As a result, the left-wing of German politics was successfully crushed in the aftermath of the fire.

The Reichstag Fire Decree was passed the next day. In one sweeping document, it suspended the most fundamental constitutional rights of German citizens, including freedom of association, freedom of the press and the right to free expression. The introduction of 'protective custody' gave the Gestapo the powers of arbitrary arrest and imprisonment without trial. It did not take them long to make use of their new powers: 3,133 'enemies' of National Socialism were imprisoned the following day, and another 25,000 were rounded up over the course of the next two months.

During Van der Lubbe's trial, the Nazis attempted to prove that he had acted on behalf of the Communist Party in Germany: the Left in turn accused the Nazis of masterminding the event to destroy them. Van der Lubbe doggedly stuck to his claim that he had acted alone and no one has been able to convincingly disprove his claim. Lubbe was the only person to be convicted for the fire and went to the guillotine December 23 1933.



Below: Van der Lubbe himself provided the most astute summary of the significance of the fire when he said: "What use was made of it may be complicated, but the fire itself was very simple."



Above: It was essential to the Nazis that the fire be perceived as a Communist conspiracy. In so doing, it heightened the public's fears of an uprising or even civil war. Germans were scared into giving up their constitutional freedoms.

Left: As Hitler watched the Reichstag go up in flames, he declared to journalists at the scene: "You are now witnessing the beginning of a great epoch in German history... This fire is the beginning."

Below: After the war, Van der Lubbe's sentence was posthumously reduced to eight years for arson. He is now widely seen as a unfortunate figure who was made a useful scapegoat by a Party hell-bent on gaining power.



antisemitic violence in full view of the world press. The Daily Telegraph's Vienna correspondent described teenage thugs with rifles roaming the streets, screaming 'Heil Hitler! Death to the Jews!'

SECRET WARMONGER

Hitler never appreciated that the adulation which he received was primarily because he had avoided war. Most Germans had been terrified his brinkmanship would start another conflict. But in 1938, as the Sudeten crisis developed, only Hitler's generals knew the Führer's secret. Hitler wanted to fight. In May 1938 he called for an operational plan to conquer Czechoslovakia: a tough proposition even if France and Russia failed to support the young republic.

In the event, Czechoslovakia's 'allies' proved fair weather friends. Hitler's propaganda about the injustices suffered by the Sudeten Germans played well to countries reluctant to contemplate war. They accepted his concern for 'self-determination', the principle espoused by the Allies in 1918, yet overlooked it in his victims.

The Czech crisis in 1938 marks a turning point in Hitler's Germany. The abrogation of Versailles and the restoration of German rule to the Saar and Rhineland, even the Anschluss, would have been on the agenda of almost any German government by the end of the 1930s if not earlier. It was Hitler's determination to destroy the Czechoslovak state went beyond traditional German nationalism. The Hitler of cold calculation, who had rebuilt Germany by calling the bluff of the Treaty powers, was replaced by the Führer obsessed by the need to complete his 'mission' before it was too late.

PRELUDE TO WAR

Hitler finally took control of the whole of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. This was to be the last time that France and Britain allowed Hitler to get away with such an aggressive foreign policy unchallenged – though he should never have been allowed to get away with it as far as he did.

After the conquest of Czechoslovakia came the invasion of Poland. Finally the Allied powers could no longer hide behind the policy of appeasement and the excuse of self-determination. On 3 September 1939 the Allies declared war on Germany.

Hitler's 'Golden Years' had ended. Foreign policy proved to be a barometer with which to gauge Hitler's popularity. When successful, his standing amongst the people soared, but later failings were to prove his undoing. Hitler was to discover that he was not invincible, and that his dream of a thousand year Reich would not survive total defeat.

'Peace With Honour'

AFTER THE PEACEFUL annexation of Austria in March 1938, Hitler turned his sights on Czechoslovakia. On 30 May he stated publicly: "It is my unutterable will to smash Czechoslovakia by military action in the near future." Hitler justified his threat by the principal of self-determination, which had been the basis of the remapping of Europe in 1918. He argued that the German minority in the Sudetenland had lost their right to self-determination.

Theoretically, Hitler's threats should have initiated a European military response. Czech membership of the League of Nations should have guaranteed the country's protection, while France and the USSR were further allied to Czechoslovakia in bilateral treaties.

When, on 26 September, Hitler's violent speech on Czechoslovakia led to British Naval mobilisation, the invasion of Czechoslovakia was postponed. Hitler was not yet totally secure, and could still be intimidated by the threat of British intervention.

Mussolini was quick to propose a four power conference attended by Neville Chamberlain, the French prime minister Deladier, Hitler and Mussolini himself. During the two day conference held on 29 and 30 September in Munich, it became clear that France and Britain were prepared to sacrifice Czechoslovakia to maintain peace. Together with Hitler they divided up the country whilst the two Czech diplomats who had been sent to negotiate were imprisoned by SS guards and informed what the great powers had decided the next day.

This willingness to negotiate and appease a dictator with an overtly aggressive foreign policy has resulted in heavy criticism of the French and British leadership of the time. Neville Chamberlain in particular is seen to have been at fault, possibly because his hatred of Communism blinded him to the greater threat of Nazism. Chamberlain extended the hand of peace by signing a declaration with Hitler that they would consult each other on foreign policy decisions in the future. Hitler had no intention of keeping any such promise, and Chamberlain's revival of the phrase 'peace with honour' will always be an ironic and haunting legacy of the misguided policy of appeasement.



SECRET HITLER FILES



Left: After the invasion of the Sudetenland 10 October 1938, German soldiers set about imposing the radically altered Reichs-Grenze (the Reich borders). The assimilation of Austria and the Sudetenland incorporated a further 42,800 square miles, 6.7 million Austrians and 3.3 million German speaking occupants of the Sudetenland into Grossdeutschland or Greater Germany.

Below: On 14 March 1939, Hitler finally achieved the total dissolution of Czechoslovakia. This was the final blow to the Allies' policy of appeasement which disintegrated entirely when Hitler invaded Poland on 1 September 1939. In contrast to the enthusiastic reception the German army received when they entered Austria, the Czechs reacted with bitterness and hatred. It was impossible for Hitler to justify this invasion in terms of self-determination. The Czechs were not Germans and, as this photograph shows, they had no wish to become Germans.



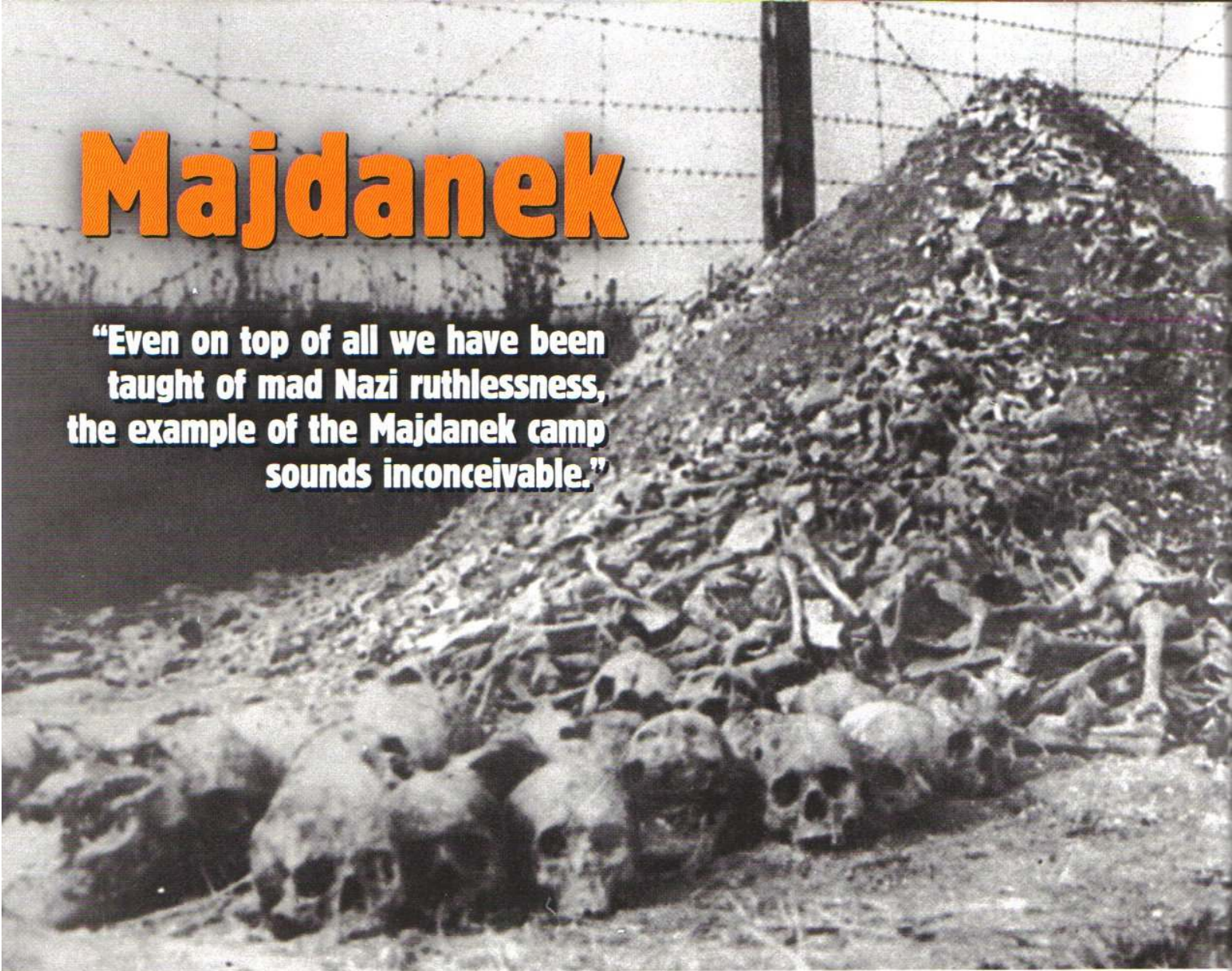
Left: Chamberlain returned to England triumphant, certain that the agreement he had reached with Hitler would restrain the German dictator. Hitler was equally pleased with the events in Munich, which convinced him that the Western powers would not intervene in the East. He told his generals: "Our opponents are little worms, I saw that at Munich."

Below and below right: The arrival of German soldiers in Austria was described as the Blumenkriege (Flower War) by Goebbels because "flowers, not bullets, greeted our soldiers". Despite Nazi manipulation of the referendum held on the subject (a ninety-nine per cent majority was recorded!), there is no doubt that the Anschluss was greeted jubilantly by the majority of Austrians.



Majdanek

"Even on top of all we have been taught of mad Nazi ruthlessness, the example of the Majdanek camp sounds inconceivable."



BBC REPORTER Alexander Werth was the first western correspondent to enter a death camp.

In August 1944, the Red Army captured the Polish city of Lublin. Two miles away they found a sprawling camp of barrack-like buildings painted green. The road to it was very dusty and a fine layer of white powder covered the grass outside the barbed wire perimeter. He could see the church spires of Lublin from just outside the camp and there was nothing sinister to be seen from the entrance, just a neat line of wooden buildings.

His Russian guides brought him to one marked *Bad und Disinfektion II*. The interior walls were made of concrete and

were lined with benches, there were taps for the new arrivals to wash at. After undressing, Werth was told, the prisoners were ordered into the next 'room' – actually a series of windowless concrete chambers, each five yards square. Only a skylight in the ceiling broke the gloom as over 200 people were packed into each one; even the most unsuspecting feared the worst by now. The door slammed shut. An SS guard could view the proceedings through a spyhole.

POISON GAS

Hot air was pumped in to raise the temperature before blue crystals – *Zyklon B* – were shovelled in from above, evaporating in the humid interior to flood the chamber with poisonous cyanide gas. There were six such concrete

chambers and at full capacity, about 2,000 people could be killed in one operation.

The bodies were pulled out by the *kapos*, 'trusty' prisoners who worked for the Germans in hope of survival – a vain hope since they were purged at regular intervals. Piled on to lorries, stacked like cord wood, the bodies were driven to the crematorium at the far end of the camp.

There, the ground was deep in ash, but not, as Werth observed, "perfect ashes: for they had among them masses of small human bones: collar bones, finger bones and bits of skull, and even a small femur, which can only have been that of a child". Beyond the ash heaps lay an enormous field of cabbages, acres and acres of the largest, greenest, most luxuriant

cabbages in Poland. All with a fine coating of white dust. Their thick roots were anchored in alternate layers of manure and human ash. Survivors told him that this hideous crop had sustained prisoners and guards alike during the two years the death camp had operated.

DEATH FURNACES

Werth saw the remains of the crematorium's wooden walls – the building had been burned down before he arrived. Six giant furnaces lay exposed to view, doors open. "The place stank, not violently, but it stank of decomposition. I looked down. My shoes were white with human dust, and the concrete floor around the ovens was strewn with parts of charred human skeletons."

Piles of coal lay ready to feed



Opposite page: Close to 500,000 people of 54 different nationalities passed through Majdanek. Of these 360,000 perished. Of those, about 150,000 were slaughtered in the gas chambers; the rest died from maltreatment, or starvation, or disease induced by the horrific conditions in the camp.

Above: These desecrated Torah scrolls were found by the Soviets among the millions of artifacts stolen by the Nazis. The Soviet army liberated Lublin on 24 July 1944. Majdanek was the first killing centre taken, and the only one captured virtually intact.

Right: Although the majority of victims at Majdanek were Jews, more than 100,000 non-Jewish Poles and tens of thousands of Soviet prisoners of war also died at the camp.



the fires. A tall factory chimney rose above them. An estimated 360,000 people had been murdered at Majdanek, some having been slaughtered in the nearby woods.

The commandant's greatest moment was 3 November 1943 when he presided over the killing of 20,000 Jews. About half were shot and buried on the edge of Krempecki forest. Even at full capacity, the crematorium could not dispose of the rest quickly enough, so a giant funeral pyre was made with logs and gasoline.

The crematorium was purpose built, designed to burn at 1,700 degrees centigrade, but the fireproof bricks showed signs of distortion and the doors were corroded. Despite the professional attention of an engineer called Tellener, the

correct operating temperature had been exceeded in the race to murder the prisoners before the Red Army overran the camp.

OPERATION REINHARD

Majdanek was one of the five extermination camps created by the Nazis in what was known as 'Operation Reinhard', after Reinhard Heydrich. The first, Belzec, was set up at the end of 1941; gas chambers were installed in March 1942 under the supervision of Christian Wirth. They used tank engines to pump carbon monoxide into the chambers, the system having been tested on the mentally and physically disabled.

Sobibor was established in March 1942 to use the same equipment, with Treblinka and Majdanek next. The fifth camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau pioneered

the use of Zyklon-B.

Like Auschwitz, Majdanek was a concentration camp, a labour camp and a death factory. It was originally built as an SS prisoner of war facility, designed to house 'partisans' from Belorussia. The inmates did include a handful of actual guerrilla fighters but most were Jewish civilians caught in the German drag net. It remained nominally a POW camp until February 1943 when it was reclassified as a *Konzentrations Lager* or KZ camp.

Conditions were appalling from the beginning, even before the killing became systematic at the end of 1942. Food was so poor and came so infrequently that 18 cases of cannibalism were recorded by the Germans.

In the third year of their war with the Nazis, Russians could be

**"I saw a mountain
Higher than Mt.
Blanc
And more Holy than
the mountain of
Sinai
Not in a dream. It
was real.
On this world this
mountain stood.
Such a mountain I
saw – of Jewish
shoes at Majdanek."**

**Poem written by
Moses Schulstein
Majdanek survivor**



Above: When the Soviets entered Majdanek in July 1944, they publicised their discoveries. After the world dismissed the claims as Soviet propaganda, Western correspondents were also invited into the camp.

Below: Two of the SS camp guards seal the door to a gas chamber. Only 117 of the 1300 German staff that had served at Majdanek were bought to trial. Of those 11 were sentenced to death.



forgiven for thinking that they had seen every evil Hitler and his regime could devise. In 1943 a number of Russian traitors had stood trial at Krasnodar for assisting the SS. They had helped murder some 7,000 Soviet citizens, mainly Jews, by means of the *dushegubka* or 'soul killer' – the lorries with sealed rear compartments into which the exhaust fumes were pumped, killing the occupants by carbon monoxide poisoning. The trial was widely reported in the Soviet press, but the stories of screaming children being manhandled into the wagons were widely regarded as Communist propaganda, even by the Communists.

HOLOCAUST DENIAL

Majdenek was on such a scale that anyone who did not see it with their own eyes tended to disbelieve it too. Konstantin Simonov wrote an article in *Pravda*, but the paper's title, which means 'Truth', was already regarded as something of an irony. In the West, Alexander Werth's report was at first dismissed – the BBC spiked it until the photographs arrived. It fell to the Illustrated London News to print the first pictures of the gas chambers, the

crematorium and the whole grisly apparatus of the Holocaust.

Soldiers of Marshal Rokossovsky's Front, the liberators of Lublin, toured Majdenek and the Soviets flew in every accredited foreign correspondent prepared to make the journey. The word spread.

The worldwide impact of the Russian discovery at Majdenek was enormous. It was the first death camp to be liberated, and was the least damaged – the Germans did not have time to hide the evidence in the face of the rapidly advancing Red Army.

HOURLY OF REVENGE

Master propagandist Ilya Ehrenburg had stoked the Soviet peoples' hatred of the Nazis since the dark days of 1941 when a German victory in Russia seemed all too likely. In the wake of Majdenek, he no longer called for victory, but for revenge.

"Not only divisions and armies are marching on Berlin", he wrote as the Red Army broke into Germany itself. 'All the trenches, graves and ravines filled with corpses of the innocents are advancing on Berlin, all the cabbages of Majdenek and all the trees of Vitebsk on which the Germans hanged so many unhappy people. The boots and shoes and babies' slippers of those murdered and gassed at Majdenek are marching on Berlin ... Germany, you can burn and howl in your death agony; the hour of revenge has struck!'"

The German civilian population paid dearly for Majdenek and the racist slaughter in Eastern Europe. The Soviet forces arrived in Germany with official sanction for bloody vengeance. Mass murder and gang rape followed all the way from East Prussia to Berlin. Ehrenburg was eventually ordered to stop his hate campaign, but not until mid-April 1945. Up to and beyond the end of the war, the Red Army conducted a reign of terror in which some two million people disappeared as completely as those put to death at the Majdenek death factory.

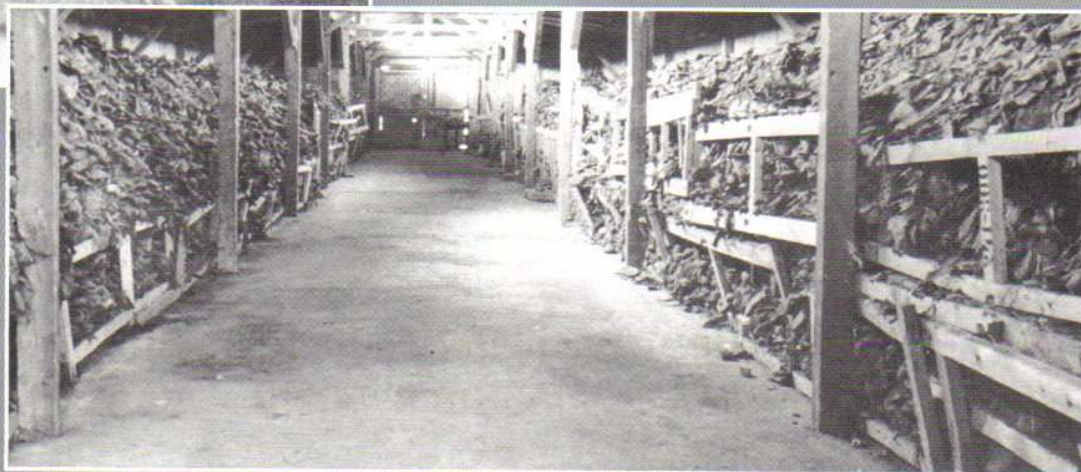
Operation Harvest Festival

The Germans gave the codename *Erntefest* (Harvest Festival) to the execution of the remaining Jews left in the *Generalgouvernement* in the autumn of 1943. The operation was the climax to Operation Reinhard, the elimination of Polish Jewry, that had begun a year earlier. The implementation of the plan was accelerated by the revolt and attempted escape of Jewish inmates from Sobibor concentration camp in October. The SS believed that additional Jewish-led revolts were possible in the area. To end more trouble the SS decided to kill the remaining Jews employed in forced-labour projects, concentrated in the Trawniki, Poinatowa and Majdanek camps.



Above: Some of the Jews arriving at Majdanek in November 1943 were shot rather than gassed. Music was played through loud speakers to drown out the noise of the mass executions. The extermination of 20,000 was carried out in a single day.

Right: In neighbouring Lublin, on a street named after the composer, was the 'Chopin Camp': a five-storey warehouse where the possessions of hundreds of thousands of murder victims were sorted out for shipment to Germany. Among the finds were 850,000 pairs of shoes.



Above left: Majdanek could 'process' 25,000 people a day. Once gassed, the victims were disposed of in the crematoria. But the incinerators could not keep up with the pace of killing, and so mass burial pyres were constructed. One such is viewed from nearby Działowa.

Above: Majdanek, like Auschwitz, used Zyklon B, which generated hydrocyanic acid on contact with moist air, as its killing agent of choice. The gas could kill 2,000 people in less than thirty minutes.

BORN TO BREED

Women in the Third Reich

Reich propaganda consistently promoted the mythical virtues of Aryan womanhood.

Hitler wanted to put back female emancipation by decades. In practice, both at home and in the workplace, the Nazis failed to reassert male dominance.

INSIDE THE THIRD REICH



Women were to be guided by the principles set forth in von Schirach's *Glaube und Schönheit* (Faith and Beauty) program: faith in the Führer and beauty as a reflection of their femininity and fertility.



HITLER WORSHIPPED a certain ideal of womanhood, and in return women worshipped him. For women the Nazi seizure of power brought with it an attempt to redefine along very traditional lines the role they would play in the Third Reich. They were to be 'Mothers of Germany'. Early on in the regime, abortion and contraception were banned along with anything else which threatened the production of healthy Aryan babies, such as homosexuality and prostitution.

The Nazis were never publicly going to state their real view of women – that they were breeding factories for the cannon-fodder necessary for Hitler to realise his foreign policy ambitions. Instead they created an ideal type for every woman to aspire to. Nazi art portrayed women within the traditional environment of the

family, where mother, father and child had their allotted roles.

Women were bombarded with the image of the ideal 'Gretchen woman'. She was robust, plainly dressed, blonde and had a figure suitable for bearing children (preferably in large numbers). Make up and fashion were condemned as un-German and representative of Weimar decadence. To diet was considered unpatriotic, since it was unhealthy and not conducive to producing babies.

BACK TO BASICS

To promote the 'Cult of the Mother', the term 'Kindersegen' or 'Blessed with children' was widely used. Hitler turned 12 August (his mother's birthday) into a day of national celebration of motherhood. On this day the *Ehrenreichen der Deutschen Mutter* – Cross of Honour of the German Mother – was awarded. This merit system, emulating an

award introduced in France in 1920, recognised women who had given birth to an unusually large number of offspring. The bronze Cross was awarded to mothers of four; silver and gold Crosses were for mothers of six and eight respectively.

There were economic incentives as well. Newly-weds were given a loan of RM1000, on the condition that the wife did not seek employment. One quarter of the loan was converted into a gift from the Führer for each of the first four children born. Parents were also given subsidies of RM100 per child, whilst child allowance only began with the third child and increased for the fifth child to encourage larger families.

Not everyone was eligible for a loan or indeed for motherhood. The loans were granted only after an assessment of the applicant's 'racial purity' and moral reliability. Those who were

unlikely to produce more children rapidly, such as single mothers and even widows, were not eligible for increased child benefits or special loans. Jews were never considered. The fate for those found to be 'genetically unsound' was far worse. Physically or mentally disabled women, whose condition was believed to be hereditary, were sterilised in accordance with a law passed on 14 July 1933.

DOUBLE STANDARDS

The behavior of leading Nazis in Germany suggests that there was a very large disparity between official policy on ideal female attributes and the type that the leaders themselves were attracted to. Whilst Hitler did seem to follow his own Aryan ideal in his taste in women, most did not. Hitler once described his perfect woman as a:

"cute, cuddly, naïve little thing – tender sweet and stupid."

INSIDE THE THIRD REICH



Above: Girls of the Bund deutscher Mädchen (BdM) listen attentively to a lecture by Heinrich Himmler. These women were targetted for Lebensborn which encouraged women to have children by SS men.



Above and Below: Not all women were eligible to become wives of the Aryan elite – the SS men. A potential bride's health and ancestry were thoroughly investigated.



Above: Nazis propagated a bogus philosophy of Blut und Boden – Blood and Soil. This photo exhorted members of the NS Women's League to work on the land.



In contrast, inveterate womanisers such as Goebbels and Martin Bormann preferred more glamorous types to the stay-at-home breeding machines. Their taste in women was a clear case of failing to practise what they preached but their positions of power meant that their double standards went unchallenged.

Martin Bormann's wife even suggested that she take part in a *menage a trois*, with her husband and his actress mistress, in order to increase the number of racially superior children produced.

The 'painted' women favoured by leading Nazis could not be more different from Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, the *Reichsfrauenführerin* – 'The Reich Women's Leader' – of Germany. She was projected as the ideal of German womanhood. In total she had ten children and her view of the female role corresponded perfectly with that of the Nazis. After the death of her first husband, she married SS *Obergruppenführer* August Heissmeyer. Together they exemplified the Nazi views on the racial superiority of the Aryan master race.

'KNITTING AGAIN'

Scholtz-Klink was in charge of all National Socialist Women's movements including the *Frauenwerk* (a federal organisation of women), the Women's League of the Red Cross, the Women's League in the *Deutsche Arbeitsfront* (the German Labour Front) and the Woman's Labour Front. Her triumphant proclamation "The German woman is knitting again!" reflects the new female role. Any women's organisation that did not coincide with this image was quickly closed down.

Female 'emancipation' was to be achieved by accepting and embracing a subordinate role. Scholtz-Klink explained:

"Woman is entrusted in the life of the nation with a great task, the care of man, mind, body and soul... It is the mission of the woman to minister... the needs of life from the first to the

last moment of man's existence."

The women who suffered most from this creed were those who had previously been professionals – doctors, lawyers and the like. From the moment they came to power, Hitler and the Nazis targetted them for special treatment. There were not enough female professionals to put up an effective resistance. Being few in number, their removal would not damage their industries, whilst the move was a high profile demonstration of the new expectations of a 'Reich woman'.

MALE BASTIONS

Married female doctors and civil servants were sacked immediately after the Nazi seizure of power. After June 1936, women could no longer act as judges or public prosecutors and were deemed unfit for jury service. The reason given for such moves was simply that women: "cannot think logically or reason objectively, since they are ruled only by emotion."

In the same year the entry of girls into the training departments for university teachers was suspended and the secondary school syllabus for girls was redirected to focus on domestic sciences.

The Nazi view of the differences between men and women was as unequivocal: women had been undermined and unfairly burdened during the Weimar period. They had been assigned roles that were profoundly unfeminine and in doing so they had ignored their primary duty as mothers of Germany's future leaders. Goebbels explained: "Our displacement of women from public life occurs solely to restore their essential dignity to them." The true vocation of women was, "the task of being beautiful and bringing children into the world."

Women on buses who were heavily made up risked earning epithets such as 'whore' and 'traitress'. Some Nazi organisations banned women

Kinde, Kirche, Küche

THE FIRST WORLD WAR encouraged the pre-existing trend in European countries towards the emancipation of women. Germany was no exception: the Weimar Republic enfranchised females; women could participate in local government; the numbers attending university increased and male bastions such as law and medicine reluctantly began to open their doors to women.

At the same time, the birth-rate declined. This was due to the shortage of men after the war (one in four women could not find a husband) and also due to a declining standard of living. This not only meant that parents could not afford to support large families but that women were also forced to work.

To Hitler this was an affront. He was adamant that the declining birth rate and increasing proportion of women in the workforce had to be reversed. His views were hardly revolutionary. Men had sought to enslave women in the home for centuries. The man was the bread-winner and his 'partner's' role was to care for her man and the countless children that he had blessed her with. Such views had always remained popular with the ultra-conservatives in Germany. Their orthodox stance was best expressed by the slogan 'Kinder, Kirche, Küche' – children, church and kitchen. These were to be the only concerns for women who were expected to devote their lives to the 'three Ks'.

Hitler's views were supported by a surprising number of women who were a major force in German conservatism. They were tired of working and disillusioned by liberal democracy, with its record of instability and hardship. To such people the threat of Bolshevism felt very real and the Nazi demand for a return of traditional values was comforting. After the instability and perceived corruption of Weimar, women enthusiastically embraced their enslavement at the hands of National Socialism.



Top right: This poster, designed in 1934, urged women to take advantage of the new child benefit initiatives such as marriage loans. The stylised Aryan mother against the rural, traditional setting epitomised the Nazi call for women to return to a simpler way of life.

Above: Women worshipped Hitler. This photograph depicts women in traditional dress making the new 'German' salute. It illustrates the obsession of Nazism with tradition and obedience. The German political tradition was autocracy and most were willing to end their flirtation with the troubled Weimar democracy.

Right: Mothers with their children in a Nazi organised 'Pram Parade'. The message is clear: German women should have babies and plenty of them!





Above: Even in the face of acute wartime labour shortages, the petit-bourgeois Hitler refused to encourage middle-class German women into work. But working-class women were forced back into the factories.



Above: For middle-class women, life continued at the same leisurely pre-war pace. Refusal to threaten morale at home by introducing rationing or widespread labour conscription weakened Germany's war economy.

who wore powder or lipstick from attending meetings.

Police in Erfurt were instructed by their Chief of Police to stop women who were smoking and remind them of their female responsibilities as a

mother. Women were also encouraged not to worry about their figures since slimness, like smoking, was not conducive to bearing children.

Members of the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* – the German

Girls' League – particularly took to this anti-modernist and anti-glamour movement. The ideal to which they aspired was the 'Gretchen' image of womanhood; broad-hipped, unencumbered by corsets, all crowned by radiantly blonde hair arranged in a bun or braided into a coronet of plaits.

The Nazis were adamant that women should not work, since work encroached on their primary roles as mothers and wives. Sometimes Nazi rhetoric had to bend to reality. The Nazis had planned to take 800,000 women out of the work force in the four years from 1933. But the demands on industry posed by rearmament and the growing shortage of males in the labour force meant that even more women were called upon to maintain industrial production. The Nazis gave generous incentives to encourage women to return to work. Factories were fitted out with better medical facilities and some even with crèches. Employers also favoured women; they cost only 2/3 the price of their male counterparts.

CLASS INEQUALITY

War brought new strains on the workforce. Conscription emptied the factories of young men, who were to be replaced by women and the elderly.

The only women who were forced to go to work in factories were those who had previously been employed in them – the working class. Hitler was happy to exploit working women, but refused to allow the middle class women of Germany to degrade themselves by performing menial factory work. Such disparity of treatment made a mockery of the National Socialist idea of a 'racial community'. Amongst the working classes there was massive resentment that they had been forced to return to the factory, whilst those better-off continued a life of frivolity.

Goering promoted a specious argument for continuing the distinction. He claimed that the middle-classes were genetically

superior and should therefore be encouraged to breed as the true bearers of German culture. Ironically, despite their preferential treatment and relatively comfortable lifestyles, the birth rate of this 'racially superior' class fell rapidly during the war.

However, many working class women had never actually left the factories, and thus the mobilisation of this group for work did not have a significant impact on the manpower shortages.

FALLING BIRTH RATE

Yet despite increasingly desperate pleas from Speer and Goebbels, Hitler refused to put the middle classes to work. Efforts to mobilise these women were half hearted, hesitant and mostly unsuccessful.

Instead, Hitler used slave labour brought in from occupied territories in the East. These people were cheap and could not complain, but they were also desperately overworked and unproductive. Unlike Germany, the Allies mobilised their women to work in vital armaments projects from the beginning of the war. German pseudo-philosophy thus helped to bring about its own defeat.

Despite the massive sacrifice Germany made to keep its women at home, the birth rate declined rapidly during the war. The initial increase in births experienced under the Nazis, had been influenced far more by improved economic conditions and stability than by the Nazi promotion of the joy of 'German Motherhood'.

Hitler's policy on women was dictated by eugenics. He was totally committed to producing a master-race of Aryan supermen to rule the conquered territories in the East. Unfortunately for Hitler, the first children born under the beneficent umbrella of the Nazi state were only 12 by the time of the Reich's collapse.



Magda Goebbels

MAGDA GOEBBELS was the long suffering wife of Joseph Goebbels. She and her husband were held up as an ideal to which all German couples should aspire. Together they had six children and their public image was one of idyllic coexistence.

The reality was quite different. Joseph was an incorrigible philanderer, unable to resist a pretty face, and in his position as minister for Propaganda he came across many. In desperation, Magda turned to Hitler who personally intervened, reprimanding Goebbels for his countless indiscretions.

Magda was revolted by the drab world of brown shirts and field grey. She consequently agreed to become the patron of a German Institute of Fashion. Her husband eventually felt compelled to support this appeal to feminine charm and poise. He talked of "An artistic sphere... where feminine beauty and grace can lead a modest but secure existence safe from the officially demanded coarsening and masculinization of German womanhood."

During the Third Reich, Magda remained an icon for the fashion-conscious. She exuded a sophisticated glamour far more exotic than the official female role model. But Magda's independence was an illusion, which relied on the acquiescence of the men around her. She was trapped by her public image as the ideal of German motherhood, and could not betray the tears of the sad reality beneath.

Magda's life was one of contradiction. A complex if vain character, she was a vivacious and cosmopolitan woman who had no time for the straightjacket into which the Nazis wished to place women. She derided the 'Gretchen' ideal of homely virtues and unadorned beauty so beloved by Hitler. But when it came to the end, she remained loyal to Nazism and to Goebbels. In the Gothic horror of Hitler's bunker, hard on the heels of the death of her beloved Führer, she poisoned her children and then committed suicide with her husband.



Top: Magda joins her husband on an official trip to Greece in September 1936. Their marriage was a tempestuous one, kept together primarily by Hitler's insistence that divorce would damage the Party's reputation.

Above: January 1939, the Goebbels attend a party in Berlin. Magda found Hitler far more attractive than her husband and the feelings may have been mutual. Magda once confided to a friend that her son Helmuth (born 1935) was fathered by Hitler.

Left: Amicably divorced in 1929, Magda married Joseph, her second husband, on 19 September 1931. Hitler encouraged the marriage to add a feminine element to his public entourage and was then integral in keeping the turbulent couple together.



KAMPFGRUPPE

During World War II the Germans were more effective at combined arms operations than any other professional army. The tactical battlegroup or *Kampfgruppe* is in widespread use today.

AFTER THE Second World War *Kampfgruppe* worked its way into the British Army's vocabulary as 'battlegroup'. The British paid their former enemies the most sincere compliment an army can: they copied them.

The concept of a *Kampfgruppe* was simple: it was

a combination of tanks, infantry, artillery, engineer and reconnaissance elements drawn from the same or different divisions. Its size could vary from a few companies to several weak divisions, but a typical *Kampfgruppe* corresponded to a US regimental combat team: a tank battalion, an infantry battalion, and supporting arms. Its precise composition was

determined by the nature of the mission and by what troops were available. Whereas the British, as might be expected, eventually formalised the arrangement, the Germans assembled, reorganized or broke up *Kampfgruppen* as the operational situation required. It was a flexible concept typical of an army that encouraged — indeed, expected — initiative,

rather than blind obedience.

The battle of Salerno is a representative example of *Kampfgruppen* in action. The beaches at Salerno were the obvious place for the Allies to land: better than those north of Naples and, crucially, within range of Allied aircraft flying from Sicily. Yet the Germans had only one division to cover the whole bay area. The 16th panzer



division had been wiped out at Stalingrad, then reconstituted from a very skeletal cadre which was far short of its authorised strength when made operational. Its tank regiment (2nd panzer regiment) had only one battalion, consisting of 66 Panzer IVs; the other was in Germany, re-equipping with Panthers. It had 36 guns, 12 of which were self-propelled, whereas British divisions had 48 or 72. Nevertheless, it was supposed to defend a long coastline from the moment Italy changed sides. The divisional commander, General Sickenius, divided his troops into four *Kampfgruppen*, named as was customary, after their commanders. They were stationed at intervals of five or six miles, occupying the remaining functioning Italian coastal defences.

UNITY OF COMMAND

Kampfgruppe Dorneman (reconnaissance battalion, one assault gun company, self-propelled gun battalion and one engineer company) and *Kampfgruppe Stempel* (two battalions of the 64th panzergrenadier regiment, two assault gun companies, one artillery battery and one engineer company) covered the area between Salerno and Battipaglia. They were attacked by two full strength British infantry divisions, the 46th and 56th.

Kampfgruppe von Doering (1/79th panzergrenadier regiment, two tank companies from 2/2 panzer regiment, one artillery battery and engineer and reconnaissance detachments) held the southern stretch of the bay where the US 36th infantry division landed, followed by the 45th division.

As a divisional reserve, General Sickenius retained *Kampfgruppe von Holtey* (one tank company from 2/2 panzer regiment, one artillery battery, one engineer platoon) near Persano.

The Allies did not have a clear idea where Sickenius had deployed his men, but all

obvious defensive positions were treated to a naval bombardment and repeated air strikes. Three light aircraft carriers accompanied the invasion fleet to deliver air strikes at short notice.

DANGER AT SALERNO

There was no way to resist on the shoreline during 9th September and the two British and one US infantry divisions came ashore without difficulty. However, the *Kampfgruppen* mounted short, sharp counter-attacks from the afternoon onwards. The combination of tanks, armoured cars and artillery made each thrust appear far stronger than it was. The Allies became very cautious, suspecting there were powerful armoured forces in the vicinity. The *Kampfgruppen* prevented the Allies from expanding the beachhead for three days, despite being dramatically outnumbered. The airfield at Montecorvino — a key objective of the landing — remained under German fire and impossible for the Allies to utilise. General Sickenius fed in his slender reserve to bolster the defence and seize fleeting opportunities to counter-attack. German reinforcements arrived in improvised *Kampfgruppen*: most significantly, *Panzerdivision Herman Göring*. This enabled the Germans to deliver a full-scale counter-attack that came so close to rupturing the beachhead that the American commander, General Mark Clark, began planning an evacuation.

SUPERB COMMUNICATION

The Germans compensated for their numerical disadvantage by combining infantry, tanks and armoured fighting vehicles better than their opponents. By late 1943 the British and Americans had so many tanks that tank battalions were often attached to infantry divisions. At Salerno, the British 56th Infantry Division temporarily included a battalion of the Royal Scots Greys operating M4 Sherman tanks.



Above: The effective functioning of a battlegroup depended upon excellent communication between the various units within it. Success was enhanced by the submission of all to one overall commander.

Opposite Page: All types of units in the German army, navy, air force and SS were considered as groups or pools. Sub-units of these formations were withdrawn from those organisations to form ad hoc *Kampfgruppe*.

However, the same cap badge rivalry that sometimes helped British infantry battalions keep fighting in the worst conditions could be a disadvantage in this respect. Liaison between infantry and attached armour was not always smooth. Neither infantry nor armour had trained together. It had been even worse during the North African campaign where the 'cavalry spirit' of the tank regiments led to a number of latter-day Balaklavas. A battlegroup of tanks and infantry had greater combat potential than the sum of its parts, but only if they two arms (and the

supporting artillery) were used to working together.

It remained a mystery to the Allies how the Germans could achieve apparently smooth coordination within their *Kampfgruppen*, even when they were assembled at short notice from divisional signals staff, returned wounded, a cookhouse detail and other dribs and drabs. (A company battlegroup based on the kitchen personnel of SS Das Reich stopped a Russian tank assault at Kharkov). However, it was not just poorly trained Red Army units that came unstuck against improvised

HITLER'S WAR MACHINE



Above and right: The training of the average German soldier was consistently better than that afforded their opponents. Unique features included a lack of distinction between officers and men and an emphasis upon every individual taking the initiative.

Below: In all cases, an effort was made to place the maximum number of combat elements within a *Kampfgruppe* to ensure its self-sufficiency.



German *Kampfgruppen*.

MARKET GARDEN

The defeat of 'Market Garden', the airborne assault across Holland, was largely accomplished by rear echelon personnel hastily assembled into battlegroups. The elite Allied parachute forces were fought to a standstill by teenage recruits, wounded or infirm soldiers or air force and navy personnel drafted in from training schools. "It is with personal pride that I regard this German victory," wrote SS-*Obersturmbannführer* Walther Harzer, "because it was achieved not by regular units, but by railway workers, *Arbeitsdienst* and *Luftwaffe* personnel as well, who had never been trained for

infantry work and were actually unsuitable for house-to-house fighting." While it is true that these ad hoc battlegroups depended on a core of experienced troops, the two SS panzer divisions were still depleted in the wake of the Normandy campaign, having only 20-30 per cent of their authorised strength. With a backbone of *Alte Hasen* ('Old Hares') the inexperienced soldiers fought very well. It was a lesson taken to heart by NATO in the 1960s and a major reason for the expansion of reserve forces like the Territorial Army.

For an extreme example of how quickly the size, composition and mission of a *Kampfgruppe* could vary, the

saga of *Kampfgruppe* Spindler during the Arnhem battle takes some beating. SS-*Obersturmbannführer* Spindler, aged 34, commanded the self-propelled artillery regiment of 9th SS-panzerdivision *Hohenstaufen*. He had won the Iron Cross in Russia and the German Cross in Gold for his bravery in Normandy. His regiment existed only in name: he had 120 men but no artillery pieces of any kind. On the afternoon of 17 September, he was ordered to take command of several infantry companies as part of a 'quick reaction' force. Before the battle was over, he would have 16 different units in his *Kampfgruppe*.

Spindler drove around in his

staff car to assemble his *Kampfgruppe*, nearly running into disaster when a building he stopped at turned out to be occupied by British paratroops. By evening, he had several rifle companies together and was attacking from Arnhem town centre towards Oosterbeek. He added some personnel from anti-aircraft batteries and some *Reicharbeitsdienst* (labourers) whom he equipped with captured British weapons.

TACTICAL INITIATIVE

On 18 September he added some tank crews who were still waiting for new vehicles, two understrength companies of panzergrenadiers. The next day he obtained ten *Sturmgeschütz*

assault guns. Over the next week, *Kampfgruppe* Spindler swelled to include the survivors of the reconnaissance battalions charge over Arnhem bridge, assault pioneers and — a mighty reinforcement indeed — the fifteen Tiger IIs of SS heavy tank battalion 506.

The ability of the Germans to fling their troops into action in such an *ad hoc* manner was critical in stopping the Allied airborne operation. The defenders reacted so quickly that the Allied plan fell behind schedule from the first day. It came as a disagreeable surprise to an overconfident Allied command, but the British at least should have known. This was the fate of so many of their attacks during the First World War. And for just the same reason. From the early days of trench warfare, the Germans had established the principle that the commander on the scene of an enemy attack would take charge of any reinforcements he received, even if they were commanded by an officer who out-ranked him. Even junior officers were trained to think 'two levels up', so company commanders were supposed to anticipate what was happening at battalion and regimental level. Training hammered home the lesson that a platoon in the right place today was worth a battalion there tomorrow. Thus it was that many a British battalion diary records the disappearance of its leading waves, cut off by German counter-attacks, isolated and overwhelmed.

STOPGAP FORMATION

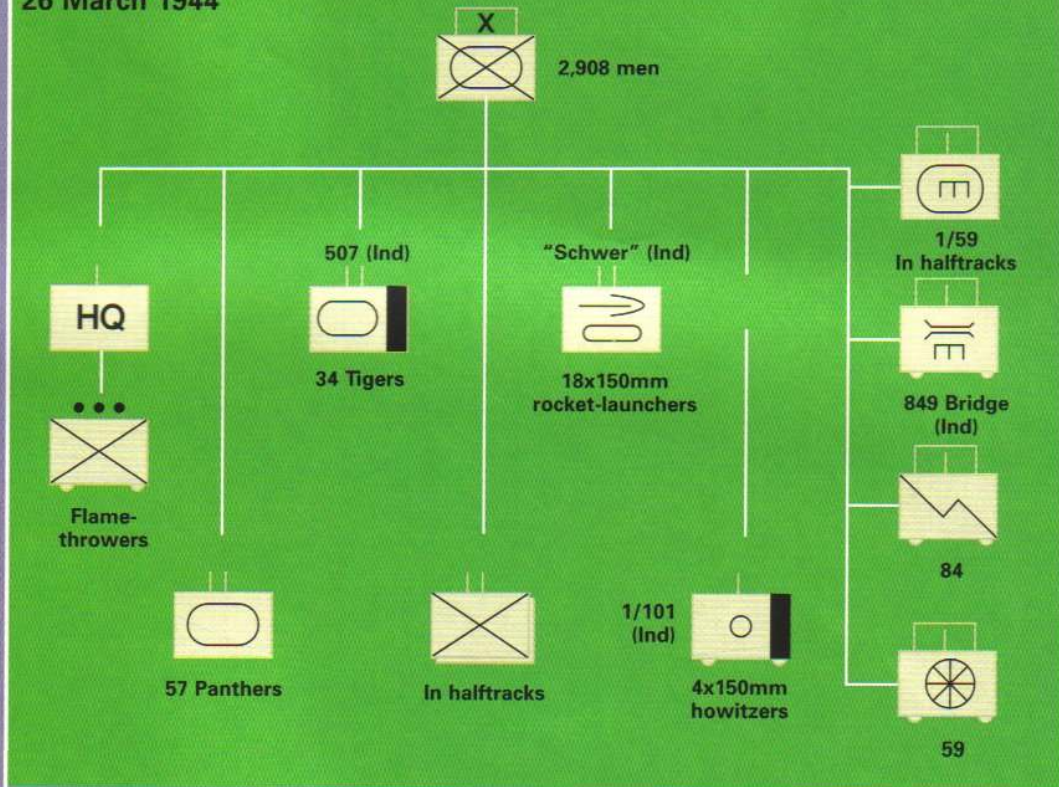
There was only one serious disadvantage to the *Kampfgruppe* system. It played havoc with an already shaky logistic system. While soldiers could be grouped together at the blast of a whistle, their food, ammunition, uniforms and equipment continued to be supplied (or not) via the normal divisional structure. A *Kampfgruppe* was an excellent

KAMPFGRUPPE FRIEBE

One typical example of a *Kampfgruppe* was *Panzerkampfgruppe Friebe*, named after its commander *Oberst Friebe*. This unit was organised within Army Group South during the second half of March 1944 to serve as a kind of fire brigade within its area of operations. Friebe, commander of the 74th *Panzergrenadier* Regiment, 8th *Panzer* Division, brought with him his regimental HQ and I Battalion. To this was added a number of other combat, support and service units from 8th *Panzer*, along with a battalion from 9th *Panzer* and several independent units from corps and army headquarters.

The unit first saw action at Brody, and thereafter in the area of Tarnopol. It was used mainly for delaying actions and counterattacks against Soviet armoured spearheads. Between 15–17 April, the battlegroup destroyed 74 tanks, 108 guns and a dozen mortars of the Red Army. In May, the battlegroup was disbanded and its surviving elements used to reinforce other depleted mobile formations.

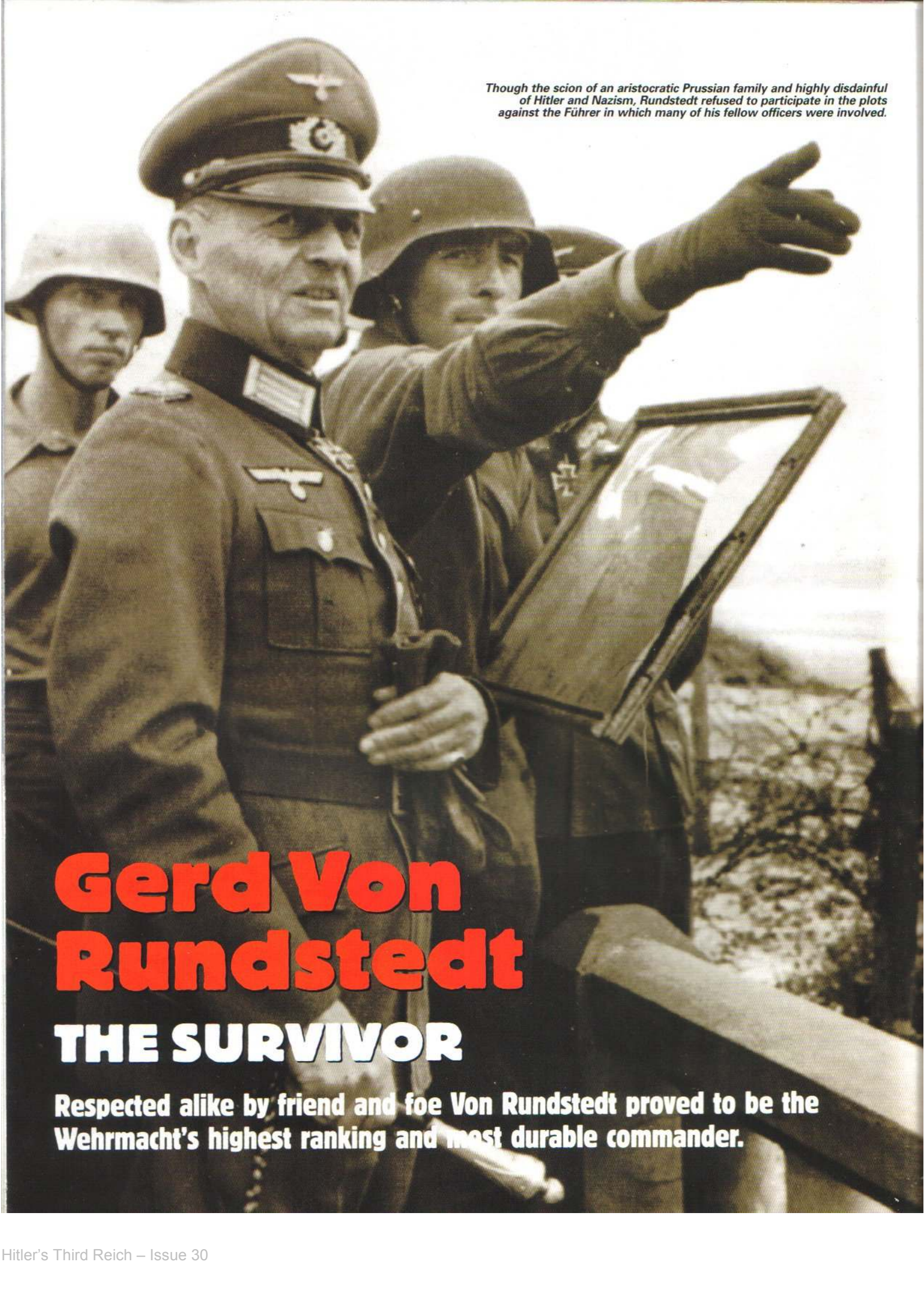
Panzergruppe Friebe 26 March 1944



Right: The *Kampfgruppe* system was at once rigid, flexible economic and deceptive. Its economical use of material helped to stave off German defeat on the battlefield.

short-term solution to a battlefield problem, but when their use became prolonged into weeks and months as it was from late 1944, efficiency declined. From autumn 1944 the German army never had the opportunity to rest and refit and *kampfgruppen* were formed and reformed to meet each successive crisis. The administrative chaos that ensued meant that meagre resources were poorly distributed. No amount of tactical skill could save the German army from defeat by then.





Though the scion of an aristocratic Prussian family and highly disdainful of Hitler and Nazism, Rundstedt refused to participate in the plots against the Führer in which many of his fellow officers were involved.

Gerd Von Rundstedt

THE SURVIVOR

Respected alike by friend and foe Von Rundstedt proved to be the Wehrmacht's highest ranking and most durable commander.



RUNDSTEDT WAS one of the 'old school'. Born on 12 December 1875 in Aschersleben, near Magdeburg, his father was of the military aristocracy; his mother of the well-to-do bourgeoisie. In WWI he served principally as a staff officer on the eastern front and attained the rank of major. Remaining in uniform, by 1932 he then General Rundstedt was commanding *Wehrkreis III*, the Berlin military district.

His career followed an uncontroversial path under the Nazis, but when the Nazi sympathiser von Blomberg was promoted in March 1938 to command the *Wehrmacht*, Rundstedt diplomatically retired voluntarily.

BACK IN HARNESS

Less than a year later, on mobilisation, the 64 year-old was recalled. With Erich von Manstein as his deputy, Rundstedt led Army Group (AG) South into Poland. After a near-perfect campaign he headed army occupation forces. He then took over AG B for the campaign in the west. Rundstedt was quick to see the merits of the plan which Manstein developed, and urged its adoption by OKW.

AG B had the major role in the Battle of Flanders. Rundstedt penetrated the 'impassable' Ardennes and drove to the English Channel. Then Hitler controversially called a halt to his forces closing in on the Allied positions around Dunkirk. Rundstedt may have played a part. Not yet a true believer in panzers, he may have persuaded Hitler that the tanks should be halted until infantry divisions caught up for a conventional assault on the beachhead. Whatever the reasons, the Allies executed the almost miraculous Dunkirk evacuation between 26 May and 4 June 1940.

PROMOTION

Rundstedt was promoted *Feldmarschall* on 19 July 1940

and his AG B was given a major role in the threatened invasion of England. The field marshal assumed correctly that this probably was only a bluff.

On 14 March 1941 he turned over AG B to his friend Witzleben and two weeks later was heading AG South for Operation Barbarossa. Knowing the eastern front from his experiences in WWI, Rundstedt tried to convince Hitler that Russia could not be conquered in a quick campaign. Failing in this, Rundstedt succeeded in having the main strategic effort made initially against Leningrad, where the Finns were expected to be of assistance. Rundstedt argued, wisely, that the main objective should then be Moscow. This broad strategic concept was adopted to the extent of making AG South's role in the Ukraine secondary. But Rundstedt remained pessimistic. On 4 May 1941 he said to Leeb, "So see you again in Siberia".

Rundstedt attacked on 22 June 1941 with six field armies – 52 infantry divisions and five panzer divisions. He made slow progress and it was not until early August, some six weeks into Barbarossa, that AG South scored its first major success: destroying large Soviet forces near Uman and pushing into the Dnieper bend.

Hitler meanwhile made his most significant tactical error of the war, stopping the advance of Bock's AG Centre on Moscow in the centre and diverting much of its strength north toward Leningrad and south into the Ukraine. Rundstedt sent Kleist's 1st Pz Group north to cooperate with Guderian's 2d Pz Gp and the 2nd Army in the encirclement of Kiev. Here the great battle of annihilation ended on 26 September 1941, when the last of some 665,000 Russian prisoners were taken. With organised resistance now virtually crushed, Rundstedt directed most of his forces east toward Kharkov and Rostov while wheeling the 11th Army south to overrun the Crimea.

The *doyen* of the officer corps



Above: An army officer from 1893, Rundstedt rose during WWI to become chief of staff of an army corps and assisted in the reorganisation of the Turkish general staff. He remained in the army after the war and was active in Germany's secret rearmament both before and after Hitler came to power.

had retained reasonably good relations with Hitler, but now the first of three breaks occurred. Rundstedt strongly opposed continuing the offensive as winter approached. Then early in November, at his headquarters at Poltava, the exhausted Rundstedt suffered a heart attack. Refusing to be evacuated he pushed on through determined resistance and his panzers took Rostov on 21 November 1941. By the 29th Timoshenko had driven the Germans out and the Führer, on a rare visit to the front, blamed Rundstedt. The tired field

marshal snapped back that the fault lay with OKW for persisting in a bad strategy against his advice. "Hitler looked for a moment as though he were about to hurl himself on Rundstedt and tear his Knight's Cross from his uniform." Rundstedt eventually resigned on 30 November 1941 – being replaced by the fanatic von Reichenau.

ATLANTIC WALL

With America in the war from December 1941, the spectre of an Allied invasion of France seemed a real prospect. In March 1942,



Above: Left to right Von Blomberg, von Papen, Hitler, von Fritsch, von Rundstedt. In 1933 Hitler needed to tread warily with the army. But by 1938 he could move against non-Nazis like von Fritsch.



Above: In July 1932 von Papen appointed the reluctant von Rundstedt military dictator in Berlin and ordered him to depose the ruling Social Democrats. Reichswehr troops are pictured on Wilhelmstrasse.

Below: Normandy June 1944. SS Generals Kurt Meyer, Fritz Witt and Sepp Dietrich in the company of the Oberbefehlshaber West. By this time, Rundstedt's strategy of allowing the Allies to land and then counter-attacking was already in trouble.



Hitler invited Rundstedt to resume active duty. The blunt but loyal field marshal spent most of his time thereafter as *Ober-Befehlshaber* or Commander-in-Chief West.

Rundstedt had to contend with serious political as well as military problems. The first arose when the Allies landed in North Africa in October 1942 and he was ordered to occupy Vichy France. He had several 'soldier to soldier' meetings with Pétain and won the Frenchman's confidence. In the delicate business of delineating German and Italian occupation zones in SE France, Rundstedt overcame national animosity to reach a satisfactory agreement.

MAKE PEACE YOU FOOLS

From late 1943, Rundstedt contended with Rommel over the best way of combatting an expected Allied invasion. When the attack did occur von Rundstedt was surprised both by the strength of the Allied landing in Normandy and the total air superiority achieved over the Luftwaffe. When Keitel phoned on 1 July he learned that four crack German divisions had failed that day to wipe out the British salient near Caen despite bad weather that had grounded Allied aircraft. "What shall we do?" Keitel wailed. "Make peace, you fools," Rundstedt snapped back, "what else can you do?" This comment earned Rundstedt instant dismissal.

Though the scion of an aristocratic Prussian family and highly disdainful of Hitler and Nazism, he refused to participate in the plots against the Führer in which many of his fellow officers were involved, and he was repelled by the attempt on Hitler's life in July 1944. Even Rundstedt's opponents recognised his considerable military talents, which were displayed in a career that spanned a half-century. General Dwight D. Eisenhower called him the ablest of the German generals of World War II. A month later he complied with Hitler's order to

preside over a court of honour with Guderian and Keitel to deal with officers accused of being involved in the assassination attempt of 20 July 1944.

Rundstedt, almost certainly unaware of the circumstances surrounding Rommel's death, represented Hitler and gave the eulogy at Rommel's state funeral on 18 October 1944.

Rundstedt quite realistically "looked upon any plan for a coup d'état in wartime as unrealistic," which is why he and so many others, who recognised Hitler's great popular support, never joined any conspiratorial effort.

Meanwhile, only two months after being replaced as OB West by Kluge, Rundstedt was summoned to Rastenburg on 4 September 1944 and reinstated. Some believed that Rundstedt was senile by this time and had "lost his grip," and for the second time "virtually 'sold out' to Hitler." But in reality, Rundstedt "was not unmoved by Hitler's appeal to his patriotism."

The Führer had decided to gamble all on a counter-offensive through the Ardennes to take Brussels, the great port of Antwerp, and split Eisenhower's forces. "When I received this plan early in November I was staggered," the field marshal told Liddell Hart in a postwar interview. After trying to have the operation reduced in scope, he ultimately gave in and confined himself to private sarcasm. He had lent his name to a scheme which went wholly beyond Germany's strength. Rundstedt received a RM250,000 birthday gift from the Führer on 12 December 1944, an embarrassment he dealt with by immediately putting the money into a special bank account he never touched.

THE LAST STRAW

His third and final dismissal came on 10 March 1945, when Kesselring became OB West with headquarters at Bayreuth. Rundstedt was taken prisoner in Bad Toelz by the US 36th Inf Div on 1 May 1945. Long ailing,

Unconditional Obedience



AS A CAREER SOLDIER and a representative of Prussia's proud military tradition of service and loyalty, Rundstedt treated Hitler as he had the Kaiser and Hindenburg before him. He obeyed orders despite the strong personal reservations that he clearly held.

He enjoyed a solid if uninspired post-war career in the *Reichswehr* and proved his political as well as his administrative capability by rising to the rank of *Generaloberst*. In 1932, aged 57, he decided to resign after the wily Chancellor von Papen declared martial law and ordered troops to eject ministers of the Social Democratic Prussian state government from their offices in Berlin. But Rundstedt, when called upon, performed the unpleasant task.

When Blomberg nominated the pro-Nazi Reichenau to succeed Hammerstein-Equord as head of the German Army, Rundstedt and Leeb were the two senior commanders who tried to block the move. But Rundstedt was among the Old Guard generals who failed to muster opposition to the growing Nazi threat to the army.

Rundstedt continued to serve Hitler, bound by his oath of allegiance, until released by the dictator's death.

Above left: Following the 'July Plot' Rundstedt agreed to Hitler's request to head the Army's Honour Court. In this role he ultimately decided which officers were to be handed over to the Gestapo.

Above right: In the turbulent world of German politics, von Rundstedt (far right) served many masters. Here he attends a Berlin military parade in August 1932, along with general-turned-politician von Schleicher.

Right: Rundstedt represented the thousands of German officers who would obey orders unquestioningly rather than heed their conscience.

Right: Von Rundstedt had been due to be indicted at Nuremberg for war crimes, but was deemed unfit to stand trial for health reasons. He is seen here (right) in May 1949 with his wife and brother Udo.

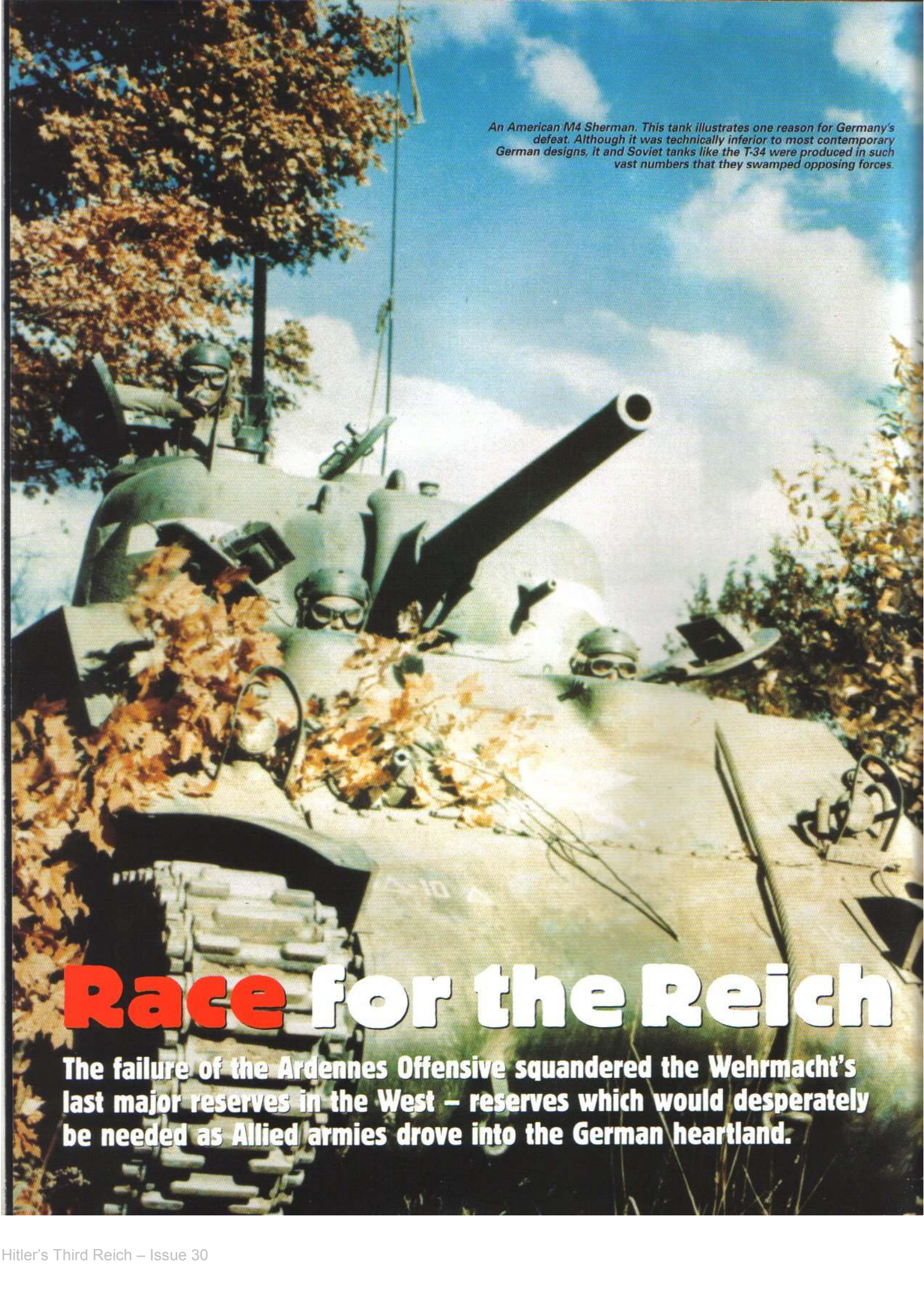
he suffered a heart attack during interrogation at Wiesbaden. With other senior German officers he went to the UK and was confined in hospitals and POW camps until July 1948. He cooperated fully with historians including Liddell Hart; who would write, "the more I saw of Rundstedt the better impression he made".

OBSCURE END

Released from POW status he was confined in Germany awaiting trial. But no real charges could be made, so he was freed in May 1949. In ill-health and obscurity he lived with his wife first in two small rooms near

Celle, then in a three room apartment in Hanover. Field Marshal von Rundstedt was the "target of serious criticism from the most varied quarters" in Germany after the war. He wrote no memoirs but, the year before his death, contributed a short foreword to a laudatory biography by his long-time Chief of Staff, Guenther Blumentritt, *Von Rundstedt: The Soldier and the Man* (London: 1952). No German edition was published. Rundstedt died 24 February 1953 in Hanover, a year after his wife. He was buried at the city's Stocken cemetery with only a few relatives and friends present.



A color photograph of an American M4 Sherman tank in a wooded area. The tank is olive green and has a long barrel. Three crew members are visible: one in the turret, one in the front hatch, and one in the rear. The tank is surrounded by trees with autumn-colored leaves. The sky is blue with some clouds.

An American M4 Sherman. This tank illustrates one reason for Germany's defeat. Although it was technically inferior to most contemporary German designs, it and Soviet tanks like the T-34 were produced in such vast numbers that they swamped opposing forces.

Race for the Reich

The failure of the Ardennes Offensive squandered the Wehrmacht's last major reserves in the West – reserves which would desperately be needed as Allied armies drove into the German heartland.



Above: GIs, green when they landed in Normandy, had learnt the lessons of combat with great professionalism. They proved as adept at street-fighting as in the daring armoured thrusts favoured by Patton.

Below: Having flattened out the Bulge in the line created by the forlorn German offensive in the Ardennes, the Allies prepared, all along the Rhine, for the final push into the German heartland.

BY JANUARY 1945, the defence of Nazi Germany was in the hands of the fanatical, the very young, or the very old. In the east, they fought to prevent Soviet forces wreaking revenge for the death and suffering that German occupation had caused the Ukraine and Belarussia by German occupation. In the west they hoped that the longer they could delay the Allies, the greater the chance that there would be a split between them and the Soviet Union. This was a delusion sustained by Nazi propaganda.

Waffen-SS troops and *Fallschirmjäger* often found themselves fighting alongside the *Volkssturm* - the Peoples' Storm, the German civilian home defence force. Many of the SS men were foreign volunteers who knew they were unlikely to receive a welcome at home after the war.

The *Volkssturm* had been established in September 1944 and was composed of civilian males aged between 16 and 60 who were capable of bearing

arms. It was trained and organised on military lines, but a shortage of weapons restricted both training and operational deployment. In January 1945 Hitler ordered that the *Volkssturm* should be amalgamated with *das Heer* - the Regular Army - which accounted for the number of schoolboys in baggy ill fitting uniforms and older men taken prisoner by the Allies at the end of the war.

The less well equipped and trained soldiers were sometimes placed in forward positions to take the initial impact of an attack. This would allow the veterans time to react and counter-attack to stabilise the front. Incredibly, right up to the last weeks of the war in Europe, the Germans were capable of assembling ad hoc *Kampfgruppen* - battle groups - that could launch local counter attacks which could stall the Allied advance.

BULGE ELIMINATED

As 1945 dawned, the Allies had almost flattened out the Ardennes Salient. By now, the front line ran from the Scheldt



Estuary past Nijmegen on the Waal, across a narrow land bridge to the Maas. It followed the river south as far as Roermond, then followed the Roer itself as far as its dams. These were key objectives in any Allied offensive: still in German hands the dams could turn the Roer from a narrow river to a raging flood. From the Roer the

line followed the old *Westwall* fortifications down to the Black Forest.

The task for the Canadian and British armies to the north, the four US armies stretching down to Strasbourg, and the French army in the Vosges, was to cross the Roer and reach the Rhine. In addition to the resistance they could expect from the German



Above: Hitler ordered the formation of the Volkssturm in September 1944. By the turn of the year this rag-bag collection of the very young and very old were in the field against the Allies both east and west.

Below: The British XXX Corps fought through the flooded Reichswald in February 1944. It was a tough campaign, but it drew what German strength there was away from the American attack to the south.



Below: Astonishingly, the Germans failed to blow the Ludendorff Bridge across the Rhine at Remagen. Captured by units of the US 1st Army on 7 March, it enabled the Allies to establish a firm bridgehead on the east bank two weeks ahead of schedule.



army, always difficult to winkle out of defensive positions, the Allies faced problems with the weather. Repeated frosts and thaws turned the ground to glutinous mud or uncertain slush. Until March, soldiers all along the front lived in miserable conditions.

The race for the Rhine began on 15 January 1945. The British XII Corps – one armoured and two infantry divisions assisted by specialised armour and massed artillery – attacked along the whole of their front into what was called the Roermond Triangle. Two German divisions waited for them behind concrete, wire and mines.

MINES IN THE MUD

The battle was never going to be anything but a dreadful slogging-match. Mines lay buried everywhere, heavy ground hampered the mine-clearing Flail tanks, vast flooded craters needed bridging, and the all-important engineer vehicles floundered in mud. Strongpoints required the attention of the Crocodile flame-throwing tanks, but wooded ravines hid German anti-tank guns which all too often turned the incendiary vehicles into flaming coffins.

But superior Allied resources eventually told, though at terrible cost. It took until 25 January for the Germans to succumb to the war of attrition.

The US First Army moved to seize the Roer dams. There were seven of them, holding back more than one hundred million cubic metres of water. The levels were particularly high as a result of the thaw, and when on 10 February the Americans took the last one they found that the Germans had efficiently sabotaged the overflow valves. This meant that any crossing of the river would have to wait until the water had all drained down into the North Sea.

ON TO THE RHINE

The main Allied offensive was ready to go in the first week of February. On 8 February RAF

Lancasters bombed Cleve and Goch, in preparation for the Battle of the Reichswald. An artillery bombardment then blanketed the approach area as the four infantry divisions of XXX Corps rolled forward.

It was one of the bitterest and most depressing battles fought on the Western Front. Canadians had to use amphibious DUKWs just to move from village to village. The most appalling traffic congestion wrecked every plan 10 minutes after it was launched. Broken roads and sodden tracks saw massive armoured columns jammed solid within the ranks of plodding, miserable infantry.

Once again, the Allies bulled through. By 21 February, Goch, Cleve and Calcar were in British and Canadian hands, and to the south the US Ninth Army was now free to launch Operation Grenade. This started by flinging bridges across the Roer opposite Mönchen Gladbach, which the Americans took on 1 March. Five days later Cologne was in American hands, and on 7 March, to the astonishment of the Allies and to Hitler's fury, the Remagen Bridge over the Rhine had been taken, apparently undamaged, and was in use by US First Army.

BRIDGEHEAD

One bridge was not enough, however, so auxiliary bridges were thrown across, both up and down stream from Remagen. This was fortunate, since on 17 March the Remagen Bridge collapsed. It had been weakened by bombing, by the attempted German demolitions, by the drumming of thousands of infantry feet and by the heavy lurches of overladen vehicles. Though the whole bridge fell sideways into the Rhine, taking 28 US engineers to their deaths, at least the disaster did not cut off the bridgehead on the east bank from all supplies.

By that time the US and French armies to the south had all crossed their own river barriers, breaking through or



Approach to the Rhine

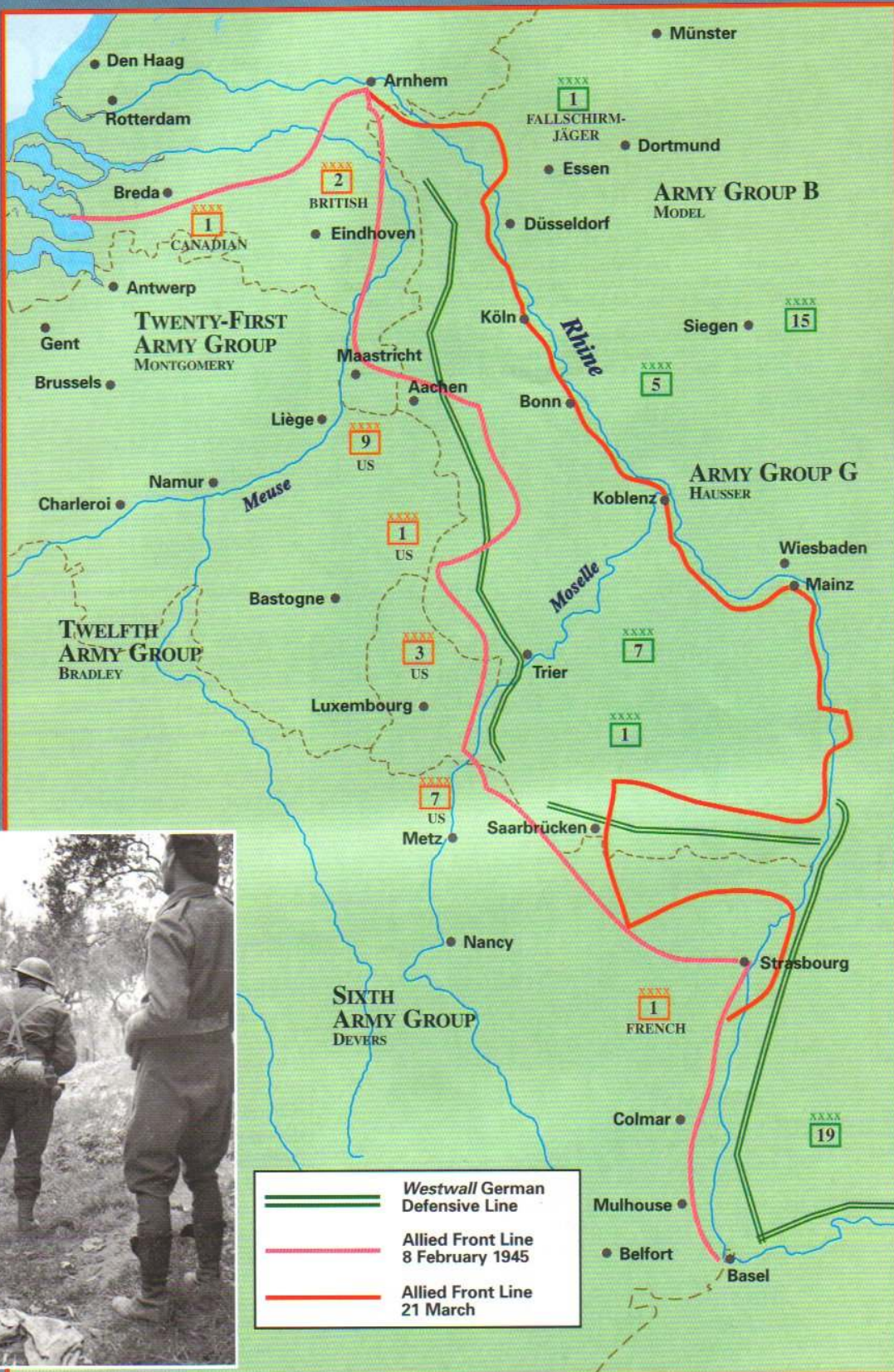
THE APPROACH of the Western Allies to the Rhine was carried out on a broad front. The British and Canadians attacked in the north after completing the liberation of Belgium. The Americans provided the muscle in the centre and the south, while the revitalised French army attacked across the border in the extreme south.

Even though the Allies were far better equipped and supplied than the Germans, the defenders resisted fiercely in many places. It was an often grim and desperate business, for Hitler had decreed that the age-old barrier protecting the Teutons from the Latins was to be defended to the last. Army units, SS men, elderly *Volkssturm* volunteers and Hitler Youth fanatics heeded his word.

Hitler ordered that any German soldier retreating across the Rhine in the face of the enemy would be subject to immediate death by firing squad – and large numbers were shot by roving bands of SD and Gestapo men.

Though encouraging to the most fanatical, this kind of ultimatum did not appeal to many ordinary troops. As a result, by 24 March over 150,000 German soldiers had surrendered and were in Allied PoW camps.

Below: Canadians from Montgomery's 21st Army Group take on a Nazi strong point during the battle for the Reichswald in February 1945.





Above: The defenders of the Reich's borders could still call on one of the most powerful tanks in the world. Unfortunately, fewer than 500 King Tigers were built – compared to 2,250 Stalin tanks and 40,000 T-34s!

Below: Designed as a 'Cavalry Breakthrough' machine, the T-34 was one of history's few genuine war-winning weapons. Advanced in design, if crude in manufacture, the T-34 was the workhorse of Red tank armies.



outflanking the Siegfried Line. Now they were fighting their way to the Rhine.

EAST AND WEST

By the end of the month the west bank of the Rhine from the Channel to the Swiss border was

in Allied hands. The British and Americans were now only 300 miles from Berlin.

The Soviets were even closer. Stalin's armies were only 50 miles from the German capital.

At the turn of the year only a few pockets of German

resistance remained on Soviet territory. The front line ran from Memel on the Baltic Sea, around the eastern quarter of the East Prussia border, down and across the Narew towards Warsaw to reach the Vistula just south of the Polish capital. From there it continued down the line of the river as far as Sandomir, where it bulged westwards in a significant bridgehead, across eastern Czechoslovakia to the Danube. There was another salient above Budapest, from where the battle area continued along Lake Balaton and the river Drava into the area controlled by Marshal Tito and his Partisans.

There were a lot of Soviet soldiers in that line. Eleven guards armies, five shock armies, six tank armies, and 46 infantry or cavalry armies, all fully equipped and supported by 13 air armies, gave the Red Army commanders absolute superiority over the 200 German and Hungarian divisions facing them. The only palpable advantage the Wehrmacht commanders might have had was the fear and hatred of the 'Mongol Hordes' so firmly implanted in the hearts of every Axis soldier.

The three Fronts at the northern end of the Red Army line – 1st Baltic under Bagramyan, 3rd Belorussian under Chernyakhovsky and 2nd Belorussian under Rokossovsky – were to concern themselves with Baltic matters.

GERMAN RESISTANCE

As was fully expected, the onslaught which began on 13 January was fiercely resisted, and within hours it was clear to Chernyakhovsky that his road to Königsberg would be won only by hard fighting. German engineers had built defence lines every few miles, and after six days his five armies had only driven through 15 of them. Even with an extra Guards army fed through, it was not until 20 January that Insterburg – a third of the way to the objective – was reached.

Rokossovsky, who had attacked across the Narew on the same day, sent two armies through the Masurian Lakes with orders to link up with Chernyakhovsky at Königsberg. Five more armies on the left were pushed in the direction of Danzig and Bromberg.

They all experienced two to three days of bitter fighting, but once the hard shell of the defences was broken, tank armies were fed in and raced ahead. By 19 January they had reached Mława, then broke through east of Tannenberg. A week later they had reached the Baltic at Elbing, cutting off the huge German garrison at Königsberg, which was isolated.

But it was further south that the greatest advances were made. Marshal Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front attacked Army Group A along the direct Warsaw-Berlin Axis. After a hurricane bombardment from 16,000 guns – packed 400 per mile, and backed up by rocket batteries – the Front was 10 miles into the German defences in the first 24 hours.

ZHUKOV'S OFFENSIVE

To the south, Zhukov's infantry had ripped open so wide a gap that he fed in two tank armies, and by evening of 15 January they were marauding nearly 30 miles ahead. Meanwhile, two of his armies had met west of Warsaw, and on the evening of 17 January the First Polish Army (serving with the Red Army since before Stalingrad) entered the ruined capital to succour the unfortunate survivors of the ill-fated revolt of the previous year.

By this time, the breach torn in the German defences by Zhukov's armies was 180 miles wide. There was nothing to stop the tank armies racing ahead the rest of the way across Poland and into Germany itself. They brushed aside several German formations hastily thrown in their way, and on the last day of the month they reached the River Oder just north of Kustrin, where they crossed to form a



Battle for Budapest

OKH PLANNED TO defend the line of the Oder river against the coming Soviet onslaught, but Hitler disagreed with Heinz Guderian, the Chief of Staff. The Führer decided that preserving Germany's last surviving oil fields in Hungary was more important than blocking the Red Army's route to Berlin. Accordingly, he ordered Sepp Dietrich's 6th Panzer Army to relieve Budapest, which had been under siege since the end of 1944.

The Soviets had captured the city by 12 February, so the position was already hopeless by the time the SS Army launched its attack. Dietrich seems to have assumed that he could retake the city in a week or so, after which his troops would be moved north to bolster the Oder defences. It was an impossible task, and Dietrich's men failed.

Hitler was enraged: rather than calling the 6th SS Panzer Army back to defend Berlin, he rebuked these, the most loyal of all of his followers. In any case, it was a panzer army in name only: by the time the Soviets captured the Hungarian oilfields on 2 April, the formation had the grand total of six operational tanks. Dietrich eventually ordered his men to head west to surrender to the Americans, rather than to the Soviets who would shoot SS men out of hand.

Top right: Budapest had been surrounded at the end of 1944. The only hope for its defenders was that the SS-led relief column could get through – a hope which was never to be fulfilled.

Right and below: 'Sepp' Dietrich had little strategic skill, but he was a hard fighter, who looked after and brought the best out in his men. However, by the time his Panzer Army with its small force of King Tigers was deployed to relieve Budapest, there was nothing his depleted SS formations could do to overcome the massive Soviet advantage in manpower and momentum.





Above: Germany's last defenders were a mixed bag. Some were poorly trained volunteers or conscripts, while others, like these SS men, had been hardened by over three years of constant combat in the East.

Below: No matter how motivated the Germans were, it was not enough to overcome the sheer power of the Red Army. By now it was the most powerful military organisation the world had ever seen.

bridgehead on the western bank.

By the end of the first week in February, the east bank of the Oder from Zehden down to Fürstenberg was in Zhukov's hands. The thunder of his guns could be heard in Berlin's Unter dem Linden. But Marshal Ivan S. Konev's 1st Ukrainian Front had done at least as well.

KONEV'S ATTACK

This was the biggest front of all, with two tank armies numbered among Konev's total force of 14 armies. The bulk of them broke out of the Sandomir bridgehead on 12 January under yet another massive artillery bombardment. This so stunned the unsuspecting defenders of the important town of Kielce that most of them were still deafened and half blind when Russian infantry occupied the town two days later.

RED ARMY RAMPAGE

Then the armies fanned out, one driving down the west bank of the Vistula towards Krakow, with another driving for Czestochowa. Within a week the 1st Ukrainian Front was advancing on a 170 mile-wide sweep. At one point Russian tanks had penetrated nearly 100 miles, smashing two German armies on the way.

Konev's forces raced up past

Beuthen and Oppeln towards Breslau, and then along the line of the Oder until it closed up to the demarcation line with Zhukov's 1st Belorussian Front. By the end of January the river was in Red Army hands from where its headwaters left the Carpathians up to just north west of Berlin.

Further south, in Hungary, fierce battles were fought by 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian Fronts when German and Hungarian armies tried hard to relieve the forces trapped in Budapest. During March the Sixth SS Panzer Army put in an attack around Lake Balaton.

SS DEFEAT IN HUNGARY

In many ways this resembled the fury and last-minute desperation of the battle in the Ardennes, but it suffered the same fate, beaten back in the end by greater numbers supplied by greater sources of weapons, ammunition and manpower. By 19 March, the SS were fleeing back over the Austrian border towards Vienna, and by that time too, the armies of the Belorussian Fronts had fought their way across the Oder and closed up to the line of the River Neisse.

It was time to take stock of the whole situation, and prepare for the last battle – for Berlin. °



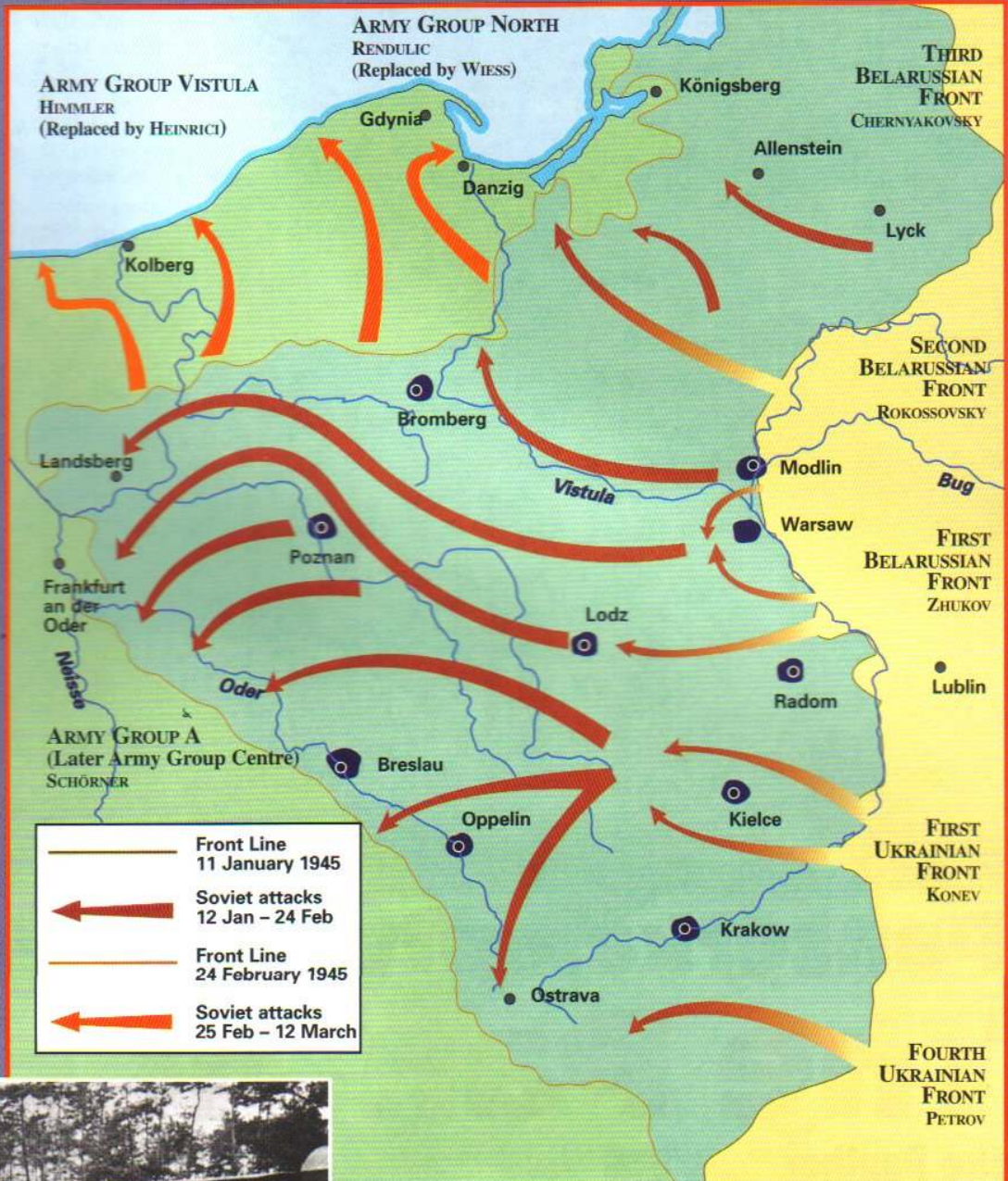
Collapse in the East

THE FINAL Soviet Winter Offensive of the war opened in January 1945. While General Konstantin Rokossovsky's Second Belorussian Front smashed into East Prussia and drove for the Baltic, the main punch was provided by Marshal Georgi Zhukov's First Belorussian Front and by Marshal Ivan Konev's First Ukrainian Front. Between them, the two rival marshals had two and a quarter million men in 163 divisions under command. They had 6,460 tanks, assault guns and self-propelled guns, together with more than 32,000 artillery pieces. They were supported by 4,772 aircraft. To the north, First and Second Belorussian Fronts under Rokossovsky and General Chernyakhov had a further 1,600,000 men.

OUTNUMBERED AND OUTGUNNED

Outnumbered five-to-one, his tanks almost immobile due to lack of fuel, and with less than 300 front-line aircraft available, Army Chief-of-Staff Heinz Guderian warned Hitler that the entire Eastern Front was a "house of cards". However, the Führer refused to believe his military advisers. "Russian Tank Armies," he said, "have no tanks".

Guderian begged for Army Group Courland, isolated north of Königsberg, to be brought back to defend the Oder. Hitler refused until it was too late to make a difference. Civilian evacuation began in the middle of January, and between January and May some two million people had been rescued from Courland, Pomerania and East Prussia.



Above: Order broke down as it became clear to even the most hardened of Nazis that the war would soon be over. Here, civilians loot a train which has been disabled by Allied fighters.

Right: As the Nazis retreated they burnt and destroyed the infrastructure of Soviet Russia. But this policy of 'scorched earth' did little to impede the Red Army which was snapping at the German heels.



The Panther emerged as one of the most significant tank designs in history. Large numbers were captured and tested, and in a testimony to their effectiveness, Panthers were used by the French army into the 1950's.



Panzerkampfwagen V

The Panther

The Panther gained an awesome reputation in action in World War 2. This was due as much to its superb crews as its design.

IN 1941, the most powerful tank in service with the German army was the Panzer IV. Soon after unleashing the onslaught on the East the Panzer armies were confronted with the Soviet KV-1 heavy tank and the T-34 medium tank, completely new types which soon proved to be a most serious threat to the German plans for 'Operation Barbarossa'. The excellent new Russian designs could have upset Hitler's summer of victory in Russia, but they were deployed in insufficient numbers, and the

Soviets had not yet mastered the most effective way of deploying armour.

General Guderian, the panzer obsessive, urgently requested a study commission to come up with a proposal for a German heavy tank as a matter of utmost urgency. The critical nature of German armoured inferiority led him to suggest that a direct copy be made of the T-34. Given the later problems encountered in producing a replacement for the Panzer IV, if Guderian's advice had been followed, Germany would arguably have succeeded in Russia.

Daimler-Benz and MAN submitted designs. The former was a virtual copy of the T-34 but the more complex MAN design was accepted. The first prototypes of the new tank, called the *Panzerkampfwagen V* Panther (SdKfz 171) were completed in September 1942, with the first production models coming from the MAN factory just two months later. At the same time Daimler-Benz started tooling up for production of the Panther, and in 1943, Henschel and Niedersachsen were also brought into the programme together with hundreds of sub-contractors. It was planned to produce 900 Panthers per month, but Allied bombing ensured that maximum production levels achieved were 330 vehicles per month. By early 1945 just over 4,800 Panthers had been constructed in total.

The Panther was rushed into



production without proper trials and numerous faults soon became apparent. In the early days, more Panthers were lost due to mechanical failure than to enemy action. The crew's confidence in the vehicle rapidly diminished.

The Panther's technical design was influenced by T-34 and it incorporated many of its features, such as wide tracks for better traction and to improve its cross-country ability, a powerful engine, a hard-hitting long-barrelled 75-mm gun and sloping armour which provided extra protection. But the Panther differed in fundamental aspects from its main opponent; it had overlapping road wheels and a state-of-the-art suspension system that enabled it to traverse rough terrain at high speed.

Despite its complexity and rather high manufacturing cost, the Panther was a very successful design. It has many advocates who have judged it to be the finest medium tank of World War II.

German comparison of their own tanks with the new (at the time) Russian T-34/85 and JS-II (122-mm), from March 23rd of 1944, stated that: "The Panther is far superior to the T34-85 for frontal fire (Panther Ausf G could penetrate frontal

armour of T-34/85 at 800m, while T-34/85 could penetrate frontal armour of Panther Ausf G at 500m), approximately equal for side and rear fire, superior to the JS for frontal fire and inferior for side and rear fire." In 1943 and 1944, the Panther was able to destroy any enemy tank in existence at ranges of 2000m, while in general veteran Panther crews reported a 90 percent hit rate at ranges up to 1000m.

"To destroy a Panther, a tank destroyer with a three inch (Gun Motor Carriage M10) or a 76mm gun (Gun Motor Carriage M18 Hellcat) would have to aim for the side or rear of the turret, the opening through which the hull-mounted machine gun projected, or for the underside of the gun shield (mantlet)." (U.S. Army report prior to September of 1944).

An unofficial rule of thumb in the U.S. Army was that it took five Sherman medium tanks to knock out a single Panther. But numbers favoured the M4: the Germans built 4,814 Panther tanks and the U.S. built 52,000 Shermans!

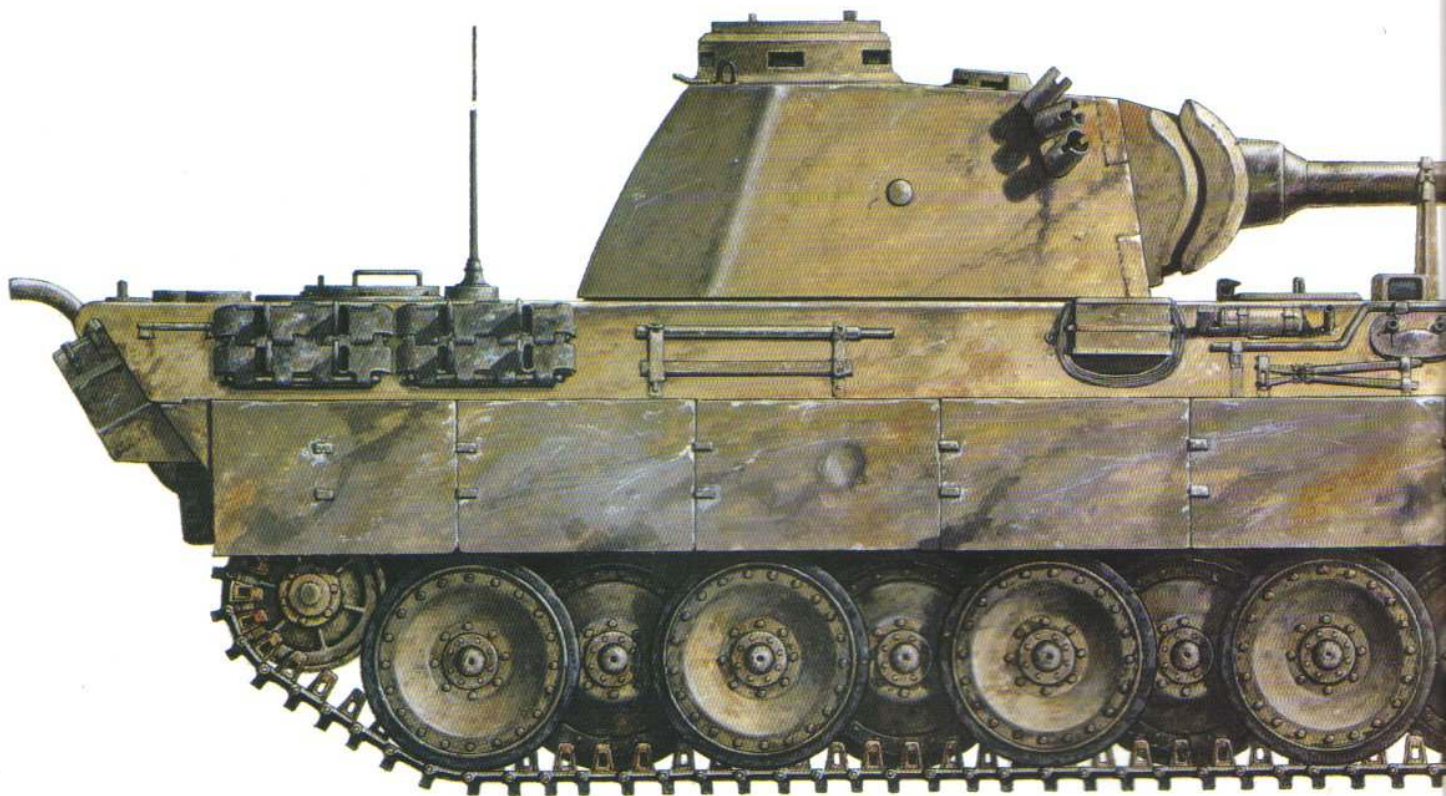


The Panther revolutionised tank design and greatly influenced post-war tank development. After the war many French Army tank units were equipped with Panthers. Other post-war users included Bulgaria (Bulgarian Panthers), Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Yugoslavia.

Above: The first production model of the Panther was, confusingly, the Ausf D. It was superseded by the Ausf A and then the Ausf G. The two Panthers here moving up to the Front in Italy are coated with Zimmerit paste, which prevented the adhesion of magnetic mines.



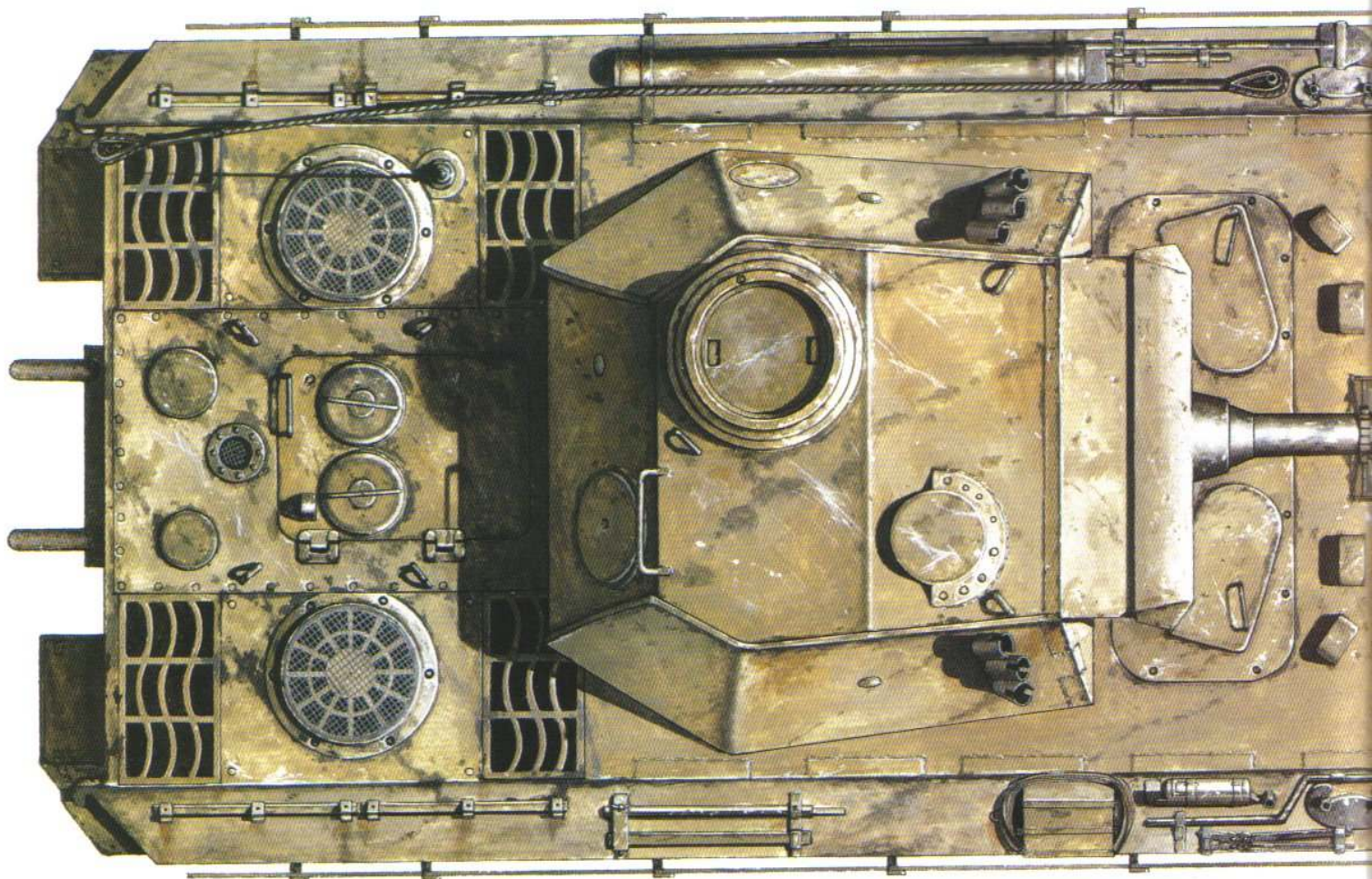
The Jagdpanther, based on the Panther chassis was the finest German tank destroyer of the war. It was fast, well-armoured and armed with the excellent 88-mm Pak 43. Only 382 were built but they made an impact out of all proportion to their numbers.



PETER SARSON / TONY BRYAN

The skirts on the sides of the Panther were fitted to prevent infantry from placing anti-tank mines onto the tank's tracks.

The Panther's wheels were coated in rubber, but this quickly wore down. It was difficult to change the interleaved wheels and those worn down to the rim shortened the life of the tracks.



The main 75-mm gun could penetrate 140mm of armour at 1000m. This penetrative power matched the 88-mm gun fielded by the Tiger.

PzKpfw V Panther Ausf D

The early model Panther did not have a machine gun mounted in the hull. This was a serious deficiency as the Panther could not combat tank killing squads effectively without it.

The Panther's was the first German AFV to be fitted with sloping armour. Copied from the T-34, this innovation deflected many shells and meant that thinner armour could be used.



PzKpfw V Panther Ausf D

Technical specification

Crew: Five
Weight: Combat, loaded: 43000kg (98776 lbs)
Dimensions: Length (including armament) 8.86m (29 ft); length (hull) 8.86m (23 ft 4 in); width 3.4 m (10 ft 10 in); height 2.98 m (9 ft 8 in)
Armour thickness: front turret 80mm at 80°; front upper hull 80mm at 35°; front lower hull 80mm at 55°; turret roof 12mm at 0° and 7°; sides upper 40mm at 50°; decking 15mm at 0°; mantel 120mm; cupola 100mm at 90°; belly front 20mm at 0°; belly rear 13mm at 0°
Powerplant: Maybach HL 230 P30 12-cylinder petrol engine developing 700hp
Performance: Maximum road speed 45 km/h (28 mph); maximum cross-country speed 24 km/h (18 mph); maximum road range 200 km (124 miles); maximum cross-country range 100 km (62 miles)
Armament: 75mm KwK 42 L/70 with 79 rounds and 2x7.92-mm MG34, with 5,100 rounds
Ammunition: Armour-piercing, armour-piercing tungsten core, high-explosive and hollow-charge

Panther Action



Below: Under the pressure of Allied bombing, the factories simply could not turn out the numbers of Panthers required. But even those tanks produced could not be deployed. Germany had no fuel for its panzers.



THE FIRST MAJOR engagement in which the Panther was involved was the massive battle known as Operation Citadel, launched by the Germans against the Kursk salient on the Eastern Front in July 1943. Much was expected of the Panther at this stage of the war; at the beginning of 1943 the Germans had lost the Battle of Stalingrad and with it the vital strategic initiative. Hitler was increasingly obsessed with finding a war-winning weapon. The Panther tank became the first

of his 'Wonder-weapons'. The beginning of the operation was delayed critically to allow for the deployment of the new Panthers virtually straight from the factory production lines. The delay brought disaster.

The Red Army, which had prior warning of the place and timing of the attack, had ample time to prepare defences in depth. The Panthers and equally new Elefants rolled forwards into a storm of artillery and anti-tank gunfire and were soon

floundering in a maze of entrenchments and minefields. Not surprisingly, the new German AFVs achieved little. The attacks made only limited penetration, and the attempts to cut off the Kursk salient from the north and south were brought to an abrupt and expensive halt.

The Panthers did not do well. They were still underdeveloped, retaining too many of the mechanical and other faults that there had not been time to cure before the battle. The Panther crews were unfamiliar with their new charges and were unable to exact from them the degree of efficiency that later crews were able to attain. Many Panthers simply broke down before they even joined the battle. Those that did take part in the fighting soon found that the armour was proof against most of the guns they were likely to encounter and that their 75-mm (2.95-in) main gun was able to take out the Soviet T-34s with lethal efficiency.

After Kursk the development of the Panther proceeded apace, and the vehicle was soon given the highest possible production priority.

The early mechanical problems were gradually ironed out and the crews learned how to use their powerful instrument of war. As a

rule the new Panthers were issued to elite formations, with Waffen SS panzer units being given priority over the army.

Within these units were concentrated the most experienced officers and men the Panzer arm could produce. But the Panther remained plagued by debilitating problems. For instance, changing a wheel was a long and difficult process, yet it was one that had to be carried out quite often as the rubber rims wore away. The fire-control system was complex for its time, and required a lot of bore-sighting and calibration. The gun itself needed constant attention: it had to generate a high projectile velocity to penetrate its main opponent, the T-34, but as it was 70 calibres long, high internal temperatures were produced and these rapidly produced barrel wear. The engine installation was another source of troubles, leading to all manner of modifications both in the field and on the production lines. Engine cooling was one long-term problem that was never entirely overcome, despite extensive changes to the exhaust system.

For all these problems, once in large-scale service, the Panther proved to be a splendid fighting machine.

HITLER'S WAR MACHINE



Above: The Panther formations were provided with the best mechanics and fitters. This proved essential because the Panther was a complex beast requiring a great deal of maintenance to keep it running.

Right: It was intended that the Panther replace the ubiquitous Panzer IV. The plan was that by late 1944 at least one Abteilung (battalion) in every three Abteilung panzer regiment would be equipped with Panthers. This was never achieved.

Above left: A Panther in action in the Normandy bocage. The protection provided by the Panther's well-sloped armour plating could deflect all but the heaviest projectiles. But this was no protection from ground-attack aircraft launching rockets with armour-piercing heads, which could knock out even the heavier Tiger.

Below: 1945 – a Panther smoulders in front of Cologne cathedral. The open hatches indicate that the occupants may have escaped. Many crew sabotaged their own vehicles once their petrol tanks had run dry.





REICH SECURITY



Although the SS Security Service was founded by Heinrich Himmler long before the Nazis came to power, Reinhard Heydrich was the driving force behind the growth of the organisation and the fearsome reputation it acquired under the Third Reich.

Germany under the Nazis was a police state. A widespread security apparatus was designed to hunt down enemies of that state.

THE TANGLED WEB which was the organisation of the security services under the Third Reich was not made any clearer by the fact that often members of one body, such as the Gestapo, would wear the uniform of another body, such as the SD, under varying circumstances.

As the SD expanded, its work overlapped with that of the Gestapo. Friction ensued as the Party's secret police and the state secret police hunted down the same people. However, party and state security forces were soon indistinguishable. On 23 June 1938 it was decreed that all Gestapo and Kripo (*Kriminal-polizei*, or plain-clothed detectives) must enroll in the SS.

On 29 September 1939, as the Polish campaign drew to a close, all of Germany's plain-clothes security services were placed under Heydrich's control. The Gestapo and Kripo, known collectively as the SIPO (*Sicherheitspolizei* – security police) were brought together with the SD into a single administration, the all-embracing *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA – Reich Central Security Office).



An example of an SD NCO's peaked visor cap and weapons belt. The belt buckle carries the standard SS motto "Mein Ehre Heisst Treue" – My Honour is Loyalty – but the toxic green *Waffenfarbe* or arm-of-service piping was unique to the security services. During the war this was changed to white, as worn by the rest of the SS.

Although Nazi security agents normally wore plain clothes, outside Germany itself this might have caused problems. As a result, security personnel were issued with SD uniforms – whether or not they were members of the SD, the SS, or even the Nazi Party.

The uniform was a grey regulation *Allgemeine-SS* 1938 pattern, with SS rank insignia on the left collar patch and a blank right collar patch. The SD sleeve diamond had first been introduced with the establishment of the old *SD-Hauptamt* in Berlin's Wilhelmstrasse after the seizure of power.

In the 1930s the *SD-Hauptamt* was divided into three main *Ämter* or offices – *Amt I* 'Organisation', *Amt II*

'Combatting Opposition', and *Amt III* 'Foreign Countries'. The three *Ämter* served as a kind of 'General Staff' of intelligence activities, controlling seven *Oberabschnitte* or sections. Each *Oberabschnitt* had two or three *Unterabschnitte*, which in turn coordinated the *SD-Aussenstellen* or 'out-stations' covering individual rural districts or towns.

The *Sicherheitsdienst* was mainly a collator of information provided by other bodies such as the Gestapo, and there were SD offices all over Germany. However, while the SD might have as many as 50,000 informants on its books at one time, its full-time staff was only about 3,000 in the late 1930s.

Below: Almost as much of a symbol of the secret police as the Gestapo leather coat, the Walther PP or Polizei Pistole was standard issue to members of the SD. First appearing in 1929, the PP was an excellent handgun. It was also manufactured in *kurz* or shortened form as the PPK, specifically designed for concealed carriage by plain-clothes men.





An armband carrying the phrase "In the service of the security police." The armband was worn by civilian auxiliaries working temporarily with the Sicherheitspolizei and the SD late in the war. This example dates from August 1944.

Below: As with most Nazi organisations, the Security Police and the Security Service of the SS had their own newspaper. Although originally a purely party organisation, the SD gradually became more and more interlinked with the Sicherheitspolizei (which incorporated the Kriminalpolizei, the Security Police and the Gestapo. Eventually, in 1939, the organisations became one.



Above: A set of non-commissioned officer insignia worn by a member of the Schutzmannschaft. 'Schumas' were foreign, non-German auxiliaries brought in to assist the SD and the security police in the Eastern territories. Their motto, as seen on the arm badge above, was 'Treue, Tapfer, Gehorsam', or 'Loyal, Valiant and Obedient'.





SS Intelligence Service

SD-Abschnitte

Berlin
Breslau
Danzig
Dresden
Düsseldorf
Hamburg
Karlsruhe
Kattowitz
Königsberg
München
Nürnberg
Posen
Prag (Prague)
Reichenberg
Stettin
Stuttgart
Wien (Vienna)


SD-Unterabschnitte

Bayreuth
Braunschweig (Brunswick)
Bremen
Dessau
Dortmund
Frankfurt / Main
Graz
Halle / Saale
Innsbruck
Kassel
Kiel
Klagenfurt
Koblenz
Köln (Cologne)
Linz / Donau
Litzmannstadt
Münster / Westfalen
Saarbrücken
Schwerin / Mecklenburg
Weimar
Zichenau



Above: A typical SD officer's tunic as worn by an SD-Hauptsturmführer. During the war, Security Police personnel working in occupied territories – the detectives of the Kriminalpolizei and Gestapo officers – customarily wore SD uniforms rather than the plain clothes which were normal in Greater Germany. Gestapo officers could be identified by the silver border worn around the SD sleeve diamond, while the diamonds worn by members of the SD proper had plain black edges.

Left: Rank insignia as worn by an Hauptsturmführer in the SD. The shoulder straps are of standard SS-pattern, with the green piping worn by the security services. After 1942, epaulettes on SD uniforms were changed to the police pattern in black and silver.



The Karabiner 98k – the Wehrmacht service-standard rifle – was virtually unchanged from the model with which the Imperial Army went to war in 1914.

GERMAN Rifles

One of the finest military rifles ever produced, the Mauser Gewehr 98 was the standard service rifle of the German army from 1898 to 1945, serving through two world wars.



THE 7.92-MM (0.312-in) *Gewehr* 98 was the rifle with which the German army fought through World War I. A Mauser rifle dating from 1898, it was actually based on a design dating back to 1888. In service the Mauser action proved sturdy and reliable, but in the years following 1918 the German army carried out a great deal of operational analysis that demonstrated that the *Gewehr* 98 was really too long and bulky for frontline use. As an immediate result the surviving *Gewehr* 98s underwent a modification programme that changed their designation to *Karabiner* 98b. *Karabiner* is German for carbine, but there was nothing of the carbine in the *Karabiner* 98b, whose length was unchanged from that of the original *Gewehr* 98. The only modifications were to the bolt handle, the sling swivels and the ability to use improved ammunition. To confuse matters further the original *Gewehr* 98 markings were retained.

'STANDARD' MODEL

The *Karabiner* 98b was still in service with the German army in 1939 (and remained so throughout the war), but by then the standard rifle was a slightly shorter version of the basic Mauser known as the *Karabiner* 98k (*kurz* for short). But the *Gewehr* 98 was still long for a carbine. This rifle was based on a commercial Mauser model known as the 'Standard' and was widely produced throughout the interwar years in Czechoslovakia, Belgium and even China. The German version was placed in production in 1935 and thereafter made in very large numbers. At first the standard of production was excellent, but once World War II started the overall finish and standards declined. By the end of the war the wooden furniture was often laminated or of an inferior material, and extraneous items such as bayonet lugs were omitted.



A trained soldier armed with a *Kar* 98k could fire 15 rounds a minute, however, like the *Gewehr* 98 the new rifle had only a five-round magazine, which could be a liability in a fire fight. Like all the 7.92-mm calibre rifles the maximum effective range of the *Kar* 98k was 800 metres (1,500 yards).

RIFLE ACCESSORIES

All manner of extras were evolved by the gadget-minded Germans for the *Karabiner* 98k. These included several types of silencer used in conjunction with special low-velocity ammunition. Other types of ammunition were tracer, used for target designation for machine-gun crews, while ball and armour piercing was used against men and equipment. Several types of grenade launcher could be fitted including the 30-mm *Schiessbecher*, which could

Above: Men of the Reichswehr shown in 1932, armed with the *Kar* 98b. Although designated a 'carbine' – a shortened, lightened standard rifle – at 1.25-m (49.2-in) it was as long as most rifles of the period.

Below: The *Kar* 98k was widely used as a sniper's weapon. It was fitted with the little x13/4 ZF-41 and later the x4 ZF-42 and ZF 42W telescopic sights. German snipers used three colours of tracer ammunition as well as ball, incendiary and armour piercing rounds.



HITLER'S WAR MACHINE



Above: The length of the Kar 98k was prohibitive, making it difficult to employ in confined spaces. But even in 1945, the majority of German troops still used this weapon.

Below: Wehrmacht soldiers, armed with Kar 98k rifles, in combat training. The mixed helmets indicates that photo dates from the late 1930s, since the compact M35 helmet was introduced in 1935.



be used to project explosive, illuminating and hollow-charge, anti-tank grenades between 45 and 90 metres. The most unusual ordnance to be fired from the Kar 98k must, however, be the *Gewehr Propagandagranate*, a Propaganda Rifle Grenade which could be used to scatter leaflets at a range of over 500 metres.

After the War the Kar 98k remained in service in Indonesia, Turkey, Latin America and Africa and is still used by guards of honour for ceremonial purposes in Germany today.

SELF-LOADERS

In 1940 the Wehrmacht tactical study groups finally issued a specification for a self-loading rifle and both Walther and Mauser put forward almost identical design studies. Prototypes of both rifles were made and issued for troop trials where the Mauser design, the Gew 41 (M), proved unsatisfactory and was withdrawn. Both designs used a system that had been developed in Denmark by Søren H. Bang: the gases emerging from the muzzle when the cartridge detonated were trapped by a cone fitted over the muzzle and

diverted to the rear. Here they operated an ejection/loading mechanism. The Walther rifle was put into production but was not a great success. It was difficult to manufacture and in the field was difficult to load quickly and was prone to be rather unreliable due to its complex mechanism. At 5.1kg (11.25lb) it was a heavy rifle and 'unhandy'. The rifles were used on the Eastern Front but production ceased when the Gew 43 went into production.

With the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 the Germans captured large numbers of the Tokarev 7.62-mm SVT38 and 40 semi-automatic rifles. The simpler Russian gas-operated bolt system was adapted to the Gew 41 and the resulting weapon, the Gew 43, was an immediate success. It weighed 4.4kg (9.56lb) and at 1117-mm (44-in) was slightly shorter than the Gew 41. It was easier to produce and incorporated features like laminated wood furniture, simple forgings and a minimum of machined parts. The detachable magazine made loading, with two five-round clips, much easier. A bracket for the Zf41 telescopic sight was a standard fitting.

Fighting in World War II was generally at close range. The long-range performance of the Kar 98k was largely wasted and its limited magazine capacity of five rounds put the German infantryman at a disadvantage.



Genesis of the Assault Rifle



AFTER-ACTION ANALYSIS in 1939-40 established that nearly all firefights took place at short ranges, under 400 metres – and not at the 1000 metres for which rifles like the Kar 98k were designed. The 7.92-mm *kurz* or short round was therefore developed by Polte for this short-range combat. With a muzzle velocity of 650 m/sec, it was much more powerful than 9-mm sub-machine-gun ammunition, with an MV of 365 m/sec. The ammunition was more compact than full-power rounds, and was ideal for automatic weapons.

Even before the cartridge design had been finalised, specifications for a new 'machine-carbine' to fire the round had been issued to industry. Two designs resulted, one from Walther and the other from Haenel, where the chief designer was Louis Schmeisser. According to legend the Haenel design showed its promise when a batch was dropped by parachute to an isolated unit of German soldiers who had been surrounded by the Soviets. Using the new weapon, they fought their way out, and in the aftermath the German army became enthusiastic about the weapon.

But at this point the heavy hand of Hitler descended. The Führer forbade any further development of the new rifle and its short round. Not to be brow-beaten, the staff planners used the subterfuge of calling it a machine pistol, and full-scale production of the MP43 was initiated. Frontline troops loved the new rifle, since it gave them a vast increase in potential firepower, and the rifle itself proved sound and easy to use. Using mainly simple metal stampings for its construction it could be produced cheaply and easily. Once Hitler withdrew his opposition, the weapon was more accurately renamed *Sturmgewehr*, or Assault Rifle. The StG44 was produced by the tens of thousand, and made an impact out of all proportion to the numbers involved in many late-war infantry encounters.



NEVER TO BE OUTDONE, Goering's Luftwaffe decided that if the army was getting an assault rifle, then their field troops had to have one as well. But there was little chance of the Luftwaffe ever getting any of the *kurz* rounds for their formations, so any design for them had to use the normal rifle cartridge. Rheinmetall duly settled to the task in its usual innovative fashion and eventually came up with the *Fallschirmjärgergewehr* FG42, one of the more remarkable weapons of World War II.

The FG 42 proved to work very well indeed, and its gas operated mechanism was destined to be used in many post-war weapon designs. But the weapon itself could make very little impact on the events of World War II. The FG 42 proved to be expensive and slow to produce, and by the time the war ended only about 7,000 had been issued.



Top: An SS trooper with an StG44 during the Ardennes offensive in December 1944. Many accessories were developed for the weapon such as the Krummlauf curved barrel that could direct fire around corners.



Above and left: The automatic fire capability of the StG44 gave a unit increased firepower. The lightness of the round also allowed more ammunition to be carried.

Below: Men of a Volksgrenadier division parade for the cameras in 1945. In reality these poorly trained units rarely received advanced weapons such as the StG 44.



HITLER'S WAR MACHINE



Above: German troops train on breaching enemy defences. They are armed with the ubiquitous and dependable Kar 98k. Over 8 million of these rifles were produced up to 1945.

Below: Fallschirmjäger units escort Dutch prisoners in May 1940. The troopers are armed with a specially shortened Kar 98k. Another modified type with a folding butt was also produced for airborne forces.



The Kar 43, which seems to have been introduced into service in 1944, was only about 51-mm (2-in) shorter but had several manufacturing modifications.

German airborne and mountain troops also used a more conventional bolt-action rifle – the Gewehr 33/40. This rifle had originally been designed and made in Czechoslovakia as the *Karabina vz. 16/33* or *vz. 33*. Following the German take-over in 1938 and 1939 it was kept in production. Changes were made to reduce its weight so that the carbine weighed only 3.5kg (7.9lb) and was only 993-mm (39.1-in) long. The penalty for these alterations was that the carbine had a hefty kick and produced a powerful muzzle flash. Additional modifications for mountain troops included adding a metal plate to the right of the butt, so that the rifle could be used as a climbing aid.

Despite all the innovations by the Germans during World War II the *Karabiner 98k* was still in production as the war ended,

looking not all that different overall from the original Gewehr 98. By that time the Wehrmacht was utilising a whole array of Mauser rifles drawn from nearly all the armies of Europe, and most of them were used to equip one arm or another of the services by 1945.

FAIR COMPARISON

Some of these Mausers, most of which were very similar to the *Gewehr 98* or *Karabiner 98k*, were kept in production on Czech and Belgian lines for German use after 1939-40. Away to the east the Chinese armies were mainly equipped with the Mauser standard rifles that were virtually identical to the *Karabiner 98k*.

There will always be arguments as to whether or not the Mauser rifles were better service rifles than the Lee-Enfield, M1903 Springfield or the M1 Garand, but although the Mausers lacked some of the overall appeal of the Allied rifles they provided the German forces with long and reliable service.

By the end of World War II, the 19th Century design of the Mauser Gewehr 98 had become outmoded. Nevertheless, it was immensely strong, hard-hitting and reliable, and it served the German soldier well for almost half a century.



IN THIS VOLUME OF **HITLER'S** **Third Reich**



HITLER'S BATTLES

The Ardennes Offensive squandered the Wehrmacht's last major reserves which would desperately be needed as Allied armies drove into the German heartland.



SECRET HITLER FILES

After 1933, Hitler and the Nazi party set about consolidating their hold on the reins of power in Germany. By 1938 their position was unassailable.

HITLER'S HENCHMEN

Respected alike by friend and foe, the outspoken General von Rundstedt proved to be the Wehrmacht's highest ranking and most durable commander.

INSIDE THE THIRD REICH

Hitler wanted to put back female emancipation by decades. In practice, both at home and in the workplace, the Nazis failed to reassert male dominance.

WAR MACHINE

The Panther gained an awesome reputation in action in World War 2. This was due as much to its superb crews as its design.

